

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. RES. 159

Recognizing the designation of the week of April 11 through April 17, 2023, as the sixth annual “Black Maternal Health Week” to bring national attention to the maternal health crisis in the United States and the importance of reducing maternal mortality and morbidity among Black women and birthing persons.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 18, 2023

Mr. BOOKER (for himself, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, Mr. MARKEY, Ms. WARREN, Mr. PADILLA, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. MENENDEZ, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Ms. SMITH, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. DURBIN, Ms. STABENOW, Ms. ROSEN, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. BROWN, Mr. MERKLEY, and Ms. KLOBUCHAR) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the designation of the week of April 11 through April 17, 2023, as the sixth annual “Black Maternal Health Week” to bring national attention to the maternal health crisis in the United States and the importance of reducing maternal mortality and morbidity among Black women and birthing persons.

Whereas, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Black women in the United States are 2.6 times more likely than White women to die from pregnancy-related causes;

Whereas Black women in the United States suffer from life-threatening pregnancy complications, known as “maternal morbidities”, twice as often as White women;

Whereas maternal mortality rates in the United States are—

(1) among the highest of any member country of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; and

(2) increasing rapidly, from 17.4 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2018, to 32.1 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021;

Whereas the United States has the highest maternal mortality rate among affluent countries, in part because of the disproportionate mortality rate of Black women;

Whereas the rate of preterm birth among Black women is nearly 50 percent higher than the preterm birth rate among White or Hispanic women;

Whereas the high rates of maternal mortality among Black women span across—

(1) income levels;

(2) education levels; and

(3) socioeconomic status;

Whereas structural racism, gender oppression, and the social determinants of health inequities experienced by Black women and birthing persons in the United States significantly contribute to the disproportionately high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity among Black women and birthing persons;

Whereas racism and discrimination play a consequential role in maternal health care experiences and outcomes of Black birthing persons;

Whereas a fair and wide distribution of resources and birth options, especially with regard to reproductive health care services and maternal health programming, is critical to closing the racial gap in maternal health outcomes;

Whereas Black midwives, doulas, perinatal health workers, and community-based organizations provide holistic maternal care, but face structural and legal barriers to licensure, reimbursement, and provision of care;

Whereas COVID–19, which has disproportionately harmed Black people in the United States, is associated with an increased risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes and maternal and neonatal complications;

Whereas the COVID–19 pandemic has further highlighted issues within the broken health care system in the United States and the harm of that system to Black women and birthing persons;

Whereas data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has indicated that Black women had the highest rate of maternal deaths related to COVID–19 in 2020 and 2021, at 13.2 per 100,000 live births, while the rate among White women was 4.5 per 100,000 live births;

Whereas, even as there is growing concern about improving access to mental health services, Black women are least likely to have access to mental health screenings, treatment, and support before, during, and after pregnancy;

Whereas Black pregnant and postpartum workers are disproportionately denied reasonable accommodations in the workplace, leading to adverse pregnancy outcomes;

Whereas Black pregnant people disproportionately experience surveillance and punishment, including shackling incarcerated people in labor, drug testing mothers and infants

without informed consent, separating mothers from their newborns, and criminalizing pregnancy outcomes;

Whereas justice-informed, culturally congruent models of care are beneficial to Black women; and

Whereas an investment must be made in—

(1) maternity care for Black women and birthing persons, including support of care led by the communities most affected by the maternal health crisis in the United States;

(2) continuous health insurance coverage to support Black women and birthing persons for the full postpartum period up to at least 1 year after giving birth; and

(3) policies that support and promote affordable, comprehensive, and holistic maternal health care that is free from gender and racial discrimination, regardless of incarceration: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the Senate recognizes that—

2 (1) Black women are experiencing high, disproportionate rates of maternal mortality and morbidity in the United States;

3 (2) the alarmingly high rates of maternal mortality among Black women are unacceptable;

4 (3) in order to better mitigate the effects of systemic and structural racism, Congress must work toward ensuring that the Black community has—

5 (A) safe and affordable housing;

6 (B) transportation equity;

7 (C) nutritious food;

1 (D) clean air and water;

2 (E) environments free from toxins;

3 (F) fair treatment within the criminal jus-
4 tice system;

5 (G) safety and freedom from violence;

6 (H) a living wage;

7 (I) equal economic opportunity;

8 (J) a sustained workforce pipeline for di-
9 verse perinatal professionals; and

10 (K) comprehensive, high-quality, and af-
11 fordable health care with access to the full spec-
12 trum of reproductive care;

13 (4) in order to improve maternal health out-
14 comes, Congress must fully support and encourage
15 policies grounded in the human rights, reproductive
16 justice, and birth justice frameworks that address
17 Black maternal health inequity;

18 (5) Black women and birthing persons must be
19 active participants in the policy decisions that im-
20 pact their lives;

21 (6) in order to ensure access to safe and re-
22 spectful maternal health care for Black birthing per-
23 sons, Congress must reintroduce and pass the Black
24 Maternal Health Omnibus Act of 2021 (S. 346,
25 H.R. 959, 117th Congress); and

1 (7) “Black Maternal Health Week” is an oppor-
2 tunity to—

3 (A) deepen the national conversation about
4 Black maternal health in the United States;

5 (B) amplify community-driven policy, re-
6 search, and care solutions;

7 (C) center the voices of Black mothers,
8 women, families, and stakeholders;

9 (D) provide a national platform for Black-
10 led entities and efforts on maternal health,
11 birth, and reproductive justice; and

12 (E) enhance community organizing on
13 Black maternal health.

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