

Rep. Moore, Sen. Baldwin: Introduce legislation to diversify the maternal health workforce as part of black maternal health caucus legislative package

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Today, Congresswoman Moore introduced the Perinatal Workforce Act as part of the Black Maternal Health Caucus's legislative package, the "Momnibus" to address the Black maternal mortality crisis. Senator Tammy Baldwin and Senator Jeff Merkley introduced the companion legislation in the Senate. Congresswoman Moore's legislation provides funding to grow and diversify the maternal care workforce. In response, she released the following statement:

"Black women already were forced to bear the brunt of our maternal mortality crisis and now the existing inequities revealed during this pandemic only burden Black mothers even more. The Momnibus couldn't be introduced at a more pivotal time.

As part of our work to invest in the health of Black mothers, we must diversify the perinatal health care workforce to better reflect the communities they serve. Black mothers need professionals who can serve as a source of support through the birthing experience, who are culturally competent to serve our most vulnerable mothers.

I am proudly joining my sisters in the Black Maternal Health Caucus along with Wisconsin's incredible champion, Senator Tammy Baldwin, to raise the urgency of this issue. We will continue fighting in the trenches for maternal justice!" **said Congresswoman Moore.**

“Maternal and infant mortality rates are tragically high in Wisconsin, and they are even higher in the Black community. We need to do more to make sure women and families have access to quality, affordable health care,” **said Senator Baldwin**. “We know that healthier pregnancies lead to healthier babies. That’s why I’m working with my colleagues to provide more resources to expecting moms and address the challenges in our maternal health system so mothers and pregnant women can get the care they need.”

This legislation is supported by the following organizations: University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, UW-Health System, United Way of Dane County, Wisconsin Alliance for Women’s Health, Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin, Planned Parenthood Wisconsin, Birthing Project USA of Southeast Wisconsin, Kids Forward, SSM Health, The Foundation for Black Women’s Wellness, and Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (BLOC).

“This legislation has the potential to be a game changer for our state. We are in full support of this bill and look forward to working with both Senator Baldwin and Congresswoman Moore as they introduce this work in Wisconsin. Furthermore, this legislation will diversify and address critical barriers impacting Black families. It will also address well-documented systemic issues that continue to impact Black women’s ability to thrive in Wisconsin. This legislation aligns with our vision of a country that supports African American families and overall health equity,” **said Gina Green-Harris, MBA, Director, UW Center for Community Engagement (CCE)**.

“The pandemic has put a magnifying glass on the disparities that exist in our health care system. We are encouraged that this bill is a step in the right direction towards equity,” **said Angela Lang, Executive Director, Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (BLOC)**.

“It is a known fact that the health care disparities that impact many people in this country lead to poor outcomes. As an African American provider in Women’s Health, I personally see the value of culturally congruent maternal care every day and aspire to provide culturally competent perinatal care to the patients I encounter. I’m proud that my elected leaders in Wisconsin are committed to expanding the perinatal health workforce and prioritize cultural congruence in training and practice. It is hard to aspire to be something when you are not used to seeing a reflection of yourself in those spaces. My hope is that the Perinatal Workforce Act leads to improved patient outcomes, reduction in biases, improvement in a health

care workforce pipeline and a more diverse, culturally competent perinatal workforce in the future,” said **Emelle Holmes-Drammeh, Physician Assistant, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, UW Health/University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health.**

“Never has it been more urgent to protect the lives of Black mothers and babies in the United States as we face mounting alarm in maternal and infant mortality rates, including here in Wisconsin where we lead the nation in racial birth disparities. The Perinatal Workforce Act is an urgent and necessary step toward building a workforce that is equipped and capable of providing the care Black women and our children need and deserve to secure our lives,” said **Lisa Peyton-Caire, CEO & President, The Foundation for Black Women’s Wellness.**

“We are deeply grateful to Senator Baldwin and Congresswoman Moore for their leadership on the Perinatal Workforce Act. As the busiest birthing center in the State of Wisconsin, UnityPoint Health Meriter has made recruitment and retainment of a diverse OB and neonatal workforce a strategic priority. Culturally responsive healthcare results in better healthcare outcomes, as it enables our patients and families to comfortably express their health concerns and needs. We cannot address our state’s high rate of maternal mortality and morbidity within BIPOC populations without having a diverse, trusted workforce. We will continuously work toward improving the safe and equitable care for our maternal patients and their families through our support of this act, as well as commitments to structural and philosophical change,” said **Kathy Kostrivas, Executive Director, Mother-Baby Care, UW Health/UnityPoint Health Meriter.**

“As a community-based health care provider, we see everyday how the COVID-19 pandemic is magnifying existing health inequities. These inequities have a disproportionate impact on the health and wellbeing of our patients- especially those who are Black or People of Color. One of the contributing causes of these inequities is a lack of access to culturally congruent maternity care and support. PPWI would like to thank Senator Baldwin and Congresswoman Moore for their leadership in introducing the Perinatal Workforce Act, which would help grow and diversify the perinatal health workforce and help reduce the stark racial health inequities that exist in Wisconsin,” said **Tanya Atkinson, CEO, Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin.**

“Wisconsin is at a pivotal moment of crisis and opportunity. Our state’s infant mortality rate among non-Hispanic Black women is the highest in the country.

Addressing the Black maternal and child health crisis in Wisconsin and across the nation requires immediate attention and action. United Way of Dane County remains fully committed to supporting health equity initiatives and working with our local health care, government, and nonprofit agency partners to reduce racial health inequities across our community. We commend the work and leadership of Wisconsin's own Senator Baldwin and Congresswoman Moore in introducing the Perinatal Workforce Act as part of the larger Black Maternal Health Omnibus. This critical piece of legislation will grow and diversify the maternal health workforce that is vital to combat maternity care deserts and to help build trust between moms and their perinatal health workers. The goals of the Black Maternal Child Health Caucus reinforce and align with our collective impact work at the Dane County Health Council and we look forward to working together on our shared priority to eliminate racial disparities in birth outcomes and infant mortality," said **Renee Moe, President and CEO at United Way of Dane County**

"Children's Wisconsin commends Senator Baldwin and Congresswoman Moore for their leadership in addressing maternal health outcomes and disparities experienced by women of color. We recognize the importance of culturally congruent care and support efforts included in the Perinatal Workforce Act to expand the existing workforce to meet the needs of Black and other minority women. We believe that this effort will lead to improvements in the health and well-being of mothers and their children," said **Peggy Troy, president and CEO of Children's Wisconsin**

"Prior to the pandemic there has been a documented shortage of skilled staff to care for patients in rural and urban areas of the country. This shortage is even more significant in the perinatal field in communities of color. We believe that every mother should have access to high quality perinatal care, regardless of their zip code. We support efforts to attract, train and retain caregivers so that all mothers get the care and support they need at the most important time of their lives," said **Damond Boatwright, Regional President, SSM Health-Wisconsin.**