

U.S. Sens. Baldwin, Merkley: Join U.S. Rep. Moore to grow pregnancy and maternity care workforce, expand access to care

Posted on Thursday, May 18, 2023

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senators Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), a member of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) and Jeff Merkley (D-OR), along with U.S. Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI-04) today introduced legislation to improve access to maternity care and grow and diversify the perinatal health workforce.

The *Perinatal Workforce Act* establishes grant programs to increase the number of maternity care providers and non-clinical perinatal health workers who offer culturally congruent support to women throughout their pregnancies, labor and delivery, and the postpartum period. The legislation is included in the *Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act of 2023*, comprehensive legislation that works to address the United States' urgent maternal health crisis.

“In Wisconsin and across the country, we are dealing with a maternal health crisis that has disproportionately impacted women of color. We must do more to address inequities in our healthcare system and save lives,” **said Senator Baldwin.** “Expecting moms shouldn’t have to worry about getting access to high-quality care during their pregnancy. That’s why I’m proud to work with my colleagues to diversify and grow our maternal health workforce and provide mothers with the care they deserve.”

“My home state of Wisconsin holds the tragic and sad distinction of having one of the worst maternal and infant outcomes in the country, with Black mothers five

times more likely to die in childbirth than white mothers. The nexus of systemic racism, inadequate access to health care, medical mistreatment, and poverty continues to cost lives. I am honored to join my friend and dear colleague, Senator Tammy Baldwin, in working to address America's alarmingly high maternal mortality rates. Ensuring every mother has access to culturally competent perinatal workers is vital to ending this crisis," **said Congresswoman Gwen Moore.**

"It is disturbing and unacceptable that Black, American Indian, and Alaska Native women are two to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women—a glaring sign that the inequities in our health care system are costing lives and hitting communities of color the hardest," **said Senator Merkley.** "We must do everything we can—including supporting more diversity and representation within our perinatal workforce—to fix this and ensure that every person in America receives high-quality maternity care."

The United States has the highest maternal mortality rate of any high-income country, and it's rapidly getting worse. [Recent data](#) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show that maternal deaths in recent year have increased by a dramatic 89%. But there is hope: More than [80% of pregnancy-related deaths](#) are preventable.

While the causes of the crisis are complex, many women do not currently have access to maternity care, and to culturally congruent maternity care and support specifically. [More than one-third](#) of U.S. counties are "maternity care deserts," with no hospitals offering obstetric care and zero obstetric providers. Maternity care access is limited in both rural and urban communities: more [than one million American women](#) live in maternity care deserts located in large metropolitan areas or urban settings.

The *Perinatal Workforce Act* would:

- Require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to (1) provide guidance to states on the promotion of racially, ethnically, and professionally diverse maternity care teams and (2) to study how culturally congruent maternity care promotes better outcomes for moms, especially in communities of color.
- Provide funding to establish and scale programs that will grow and diversify the maternal health workforce, increasing the number of nurses, physician assistants, and other perinatal health workers who moms can trust throughout their pregnancies, labor and delivery, and the postpartum period.

- Study the barriers that prevent women – particularly from underserved communities – from entering maternity care professions and receiving equitable compensation.

The Perinatal Workforce Act is supported by University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and

Public Health, UW-Health System, Planned Parenthood Wisconsin, United Way of Dane County, Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin, Birthing Project USA of Southeast Wisconsin, Kids Forward, SSM Health, The Foundation for Black Women's Wellness, Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (BLOC), Wisconsin Doula of Color Collective Inc., and Birthing Intuition and Wellness Services LLC.

The *Perinatal Health Act* is included in the [Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act](#), led by Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) and U.S. Representatives Lauren Underwood (D-IL-14) and Alma Adams (D-NC-12). The Momnibus package makes critical investments to address social determinants of health, provide funding for community-based organizations, grow and diversify the perinatal health workforce, expand access to maternal mental health care, address the effects of climate change on maternal and infant health, and improve data collection processes. The *Black Maternal Health Momnibus* is endorsed by more than 200 organizations. A full list of supporters for the 'Momnibus' can be found [here](#) and additional quotes of support can be found [here](#).