

Wisconsin Catholic Conference: Statement on postpartum care

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The Wisconsin Catholic Conference expresses its deep disappointment that the Joint Finance Committee of the Wisconsin State Legislature removed the postpartum care extension from the state's 2023-25 budget. The removed measure would have extended critical medical assistance to mothers under the state's BadgerCare (Medicaid) program from the current 60 days to a full year after giving birth.

Postpartum women can suffer from serious conditions like diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, depression, and substance use disorders. Life-threatening complications frequently arise months after giving birth, far beyond the current 60 days of coverage. In fact, 75 percent of pregnancy-associated maternal deaths in Wisconsin occur postpartum. Postpartum coverage is especially critical for women of color, who still face disproportionate maternal mortality rates in our state.

Extending postpartum care to a year after birth would mean that a woman is not forced to lose her health insurance and primary care provider at a time when her steady access to healthcare is essential, and while she is rearranging her life around the care of her newborn.

Postpartum care is not a matter of charity or welfare, it is a matter of justice. It renders to each mother that which is her right—the right to quality health care. Though some have argued that Wisconsin cannot afford expansion, the truth is that when we fail to meet the most basic human needs at the beginning, the state will only end up paying more to stabilize families later on.

While the postpartum extension has been taken out of the budget, we urge concerned citizens to contact their elected officials and ask that they pass identical legislation in the form of companion bills SB-110 and AB-114. These bills have

garnered broad bipartisan support with 70 legislators signed on and over 40 advocacy groups registered in support. No one has registered in opposition.

If Wisconsin mothers thrive, Wisconsin children thrive too. This legislation, like the soon-to-be introduced bill package, Embrace Them Both, provides equal care for both women and children who are vital to the future of this state. Forty-three other states are implementing or have implemented a 12-month postpartum coverage policy. Today, more than ever, Wisconsin must follow suit and embrace them both.