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Legislature Passes Racial Justice and Maternal Health Equity Legislation

Establishes a commission to address racial inequities in maternal mortality and morbidity

BOSTON (01/5/2021) – The Massachusetts Legislature on Tuesday passed legislation aimed at eliminating racial inequities in maternal health.

A Resolve reducing racial inequities in maternal health creates a special legislative commission to make recommendations to address barriers that result in racial inequities, including women of color dying of pregnancy-related causes. The Commission is charged with gathering statewide data on maternal mortality and making recommendations to reduce and eliminate racial barriers to accessing equitable maternal care.

“Black people giving birth in Massachusetts are twice as likely as white people to die due to complications during and after childbirth. We cannot allow that to stand, nor can we tackle a problem without understanding the full extent of its impact,” said lead sponsor **Senator Becca Rausch (D–Needham)**. The maternal health disparities commission established by this legislation will center the experiences of Black and brown birthing people and directly enable the crafting and enactment of legislation that combats these stark health inequities and advances affordable, accessible, and safe maternal health care regardless of race or zip code. I am grateful to Senate President Karen Spilka, Senate Rules Committee Chair Joan Lovely, my House co-filers Representatives Liz Miranda and Kay Khan, and the many advocates whose collaboration made this commission possible.”

“At a time when inequities in our health care system are being highlighted by a global pandemic, I am proud to see Massachusetts take this step to address racial inequity in maternal health,” stated **Senate President Karen E. Spilka (D-Ashland)**. “The commission established by this legislation is just the beginning of our efforts to turn the tide on the tragic imbalance in treatment and outcomes that exists in maternal health, particularly in our Black and brown communities, and ensuring all pregnant people and new mothers have access to the care they need. I’d like to express my gratitude to Senators Becca Rausch and Joan Lovely for their work to advance this

legislation, as well as Speaker Mariano and Rep. Kay Khan and Rep. Miranda for their collaboration and steadfast advocacy.”

“The Legislature took an important step toward reducing racial inequities in maternal health with this legislation, and I’m proud of the House’s work on how to ensure maternal health equity,” said **House Speaker Ronald J. Mariano (D-Quincy)**. “I am grateful to Chair Khan, Representative Miranda and Chair Mahoney for their hard work, and I thank Senate President Spilka for her partnership on this critical issue.”

The commission members include public health experts, physicians, midwives, a doula, and individuals with first-hand experience with health disparities, including a survivor of maternal morbidity. The bill requires that a majority of commission members be from Massachusetts communities most impacted by maternal health inequity, which statistically are Black and brown communities.

"Despite our world-class health care system, Massachusetts is experiencing a maternal mortality and morbidity crisis, in which Black and Brown mothers face life-threatening inequities," said **Representative Kay Khan (D-Newton)**, Chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities. “I am proud that under Speaker Mariano and Senate President Spilka’s leadership, the Legislature prioritized the enactment of this bill to address structural racism and discrimination in our maternal health care system. I am grateful to my legislative partners in this effort, Representative Liz Miranda, Chair John Mahoney, and Senator Becca Rausch, as well as our colleagues who voted unanimously for the passage of this critical maternal equity legislation."

“Even with the best institutions in the world right here in the Commonwealth, maternal mortality is still a public health crisis that impacts all women, but particularly black women who die at twice the rate of white women in Massachusetts,” said **Representative Liz Miranda (D-Boston)**. “This legislation allows us to approach the maternal mortality crisis as both a racial justice and public health issue by seeking to understand both the socioeconomic determinants of health while also tackling the issue of racism head-on. Maternal justice is racial justice. I thank my colleagues Senator Rausch and Representative Khan for their partnership and leadership on this important issue.”

“The Legislature has acted today because racial inequities in maternal health have persisted. The creation of this Commission represents an important first step in eliminating those inequities and ensuring quality maternal healthcare for all,” said **Senator Joan B. Lovely (D-Salem)**. “I am grateful to President Spilka for her leadership and Senator Rausch for her strong commitment to this issue that affects so many women in the Commonwealth.”

The 25-member commission will investigate and report on:

- Best-practices by other states or grass-roots organizations to reduce or eliminate racial inequities in maternal health or severe maternal morbidity, including, among other approaches, culturally competent and affordable doula services;

- Accessibility and affordability of birthing centers, maternal medical homes, and doula care and the diversity and cultural competency of maternal health care providers;
- Barriers to accessing prenatal and postpartum care;
- How historical and current structural, institutional and individual forms of racism affect maternal mortality as well as potential solutions, such as bias training in hospital facilities and birthing centers; and
- Availability of statewide data relating to maternal mortality and morbidity and additional data deemed necessary.

The bill is now with the governor.

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