

Durbin, Duckworth Introduce Momma Act To Reduce Maternal And Infant Mortality Rates

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) today introduced the bicameral *Mothers and Offspring Mortality and Morbidity Awareness (MOMMA) Act*. The legislation seeks to reduce America’s rising maternal and infant mortality rate, especially for moms and babies of color who are significantly more likely to die during or shortly after pregnancy.

On average, maternal mortality claims the lives of about 700 American moms each year—an additional 70,000 women suffer near-fatal health complications—with more than 60 percent of these deaths being preventable. Further, every year in the United States, more than 23,000 infants die, many due to factors that could have been prevented. Women and babies of color are particularly at risk—with Black women being about three times more likely than white women to suffer pregnancy-related deaths, and Black babies being twice as likely as white babies to die in their first year of life. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the maternal health crisis and need to address these racially disparate outcomes.

“In the United States, Black women are about three times more likely than white women to die as a result of their pregnancy. In Illinois, Black women are six times more likely than white women to die. And not only are we losing moms, but we are losing babies as well. This is a national tragedy and these disparities are unacceptable,” Durbin said. “Many of these deaths could have been prevented with the right interventions and health care. That’s why Senator Duckworth and I are introducing the *MOMMA Act* to help provide more comprehensive and culturally competent maternal and postpartum health care for all women and babies.”

“It is absolutely unconscionable that hundreds of expectant and new moms are dying every year from preventable causes in this country,” Duckworth said. “For Black women especially, the rising maternal mortality rate and medical racism in our country is a crisis, and I’m proud to be leading this legislation alongside Senator Durbin to address this crisis. No one should die from preventable causes, and I will continue to work to improve our health system so mothers can feel safe and supported.”

The United States is one of only 13 countries in the world where the maternal mortality rate is worse now than it was 25 years ago and is the only industrialized country with a rising maternal mortality rate. The shocking statistics cut across geography, education level, income, and socio-economic status. Further, the United States ranks 32nd out of the 35 wealthiest nations when it comes to infant mortality—with 23,000 babies born in the United States dying annually.

Maternal and infant mortality is especially important to Illinois families. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), on average, 73 new Illinois mothers die every year, with more than 70 percent of these deaths deemed preventable. While Illinois’ maternal mortality rate is slightly lower than the national average, the disparity of Black mothers dying is nearly double the national disparity. According to the IDPH, Black mothers in Illinois die at 600 percent the rate of their white counterparts.

The *MOMMA Act* uses a six-pronged approach to address and reduce maternal deaths by:

- Establishing national obstetric emergency protocols through a federal expert committee,
- Ensuring dissemination of best shared practices and coordination amongst maternal mortality review committees,
- Standardizing data collection and reporting,
- Improving access to culturally competent care throughout the care continuum,
- Providing guidance and options for states to adopt and pay for doula support services, and
- Expanding Medicaid coverage to new mom’s entire post-partum period (1 year).

Along with Durbin and Duckworth, the bill is cosponsored by Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Tina Smith (D-MN), Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), and Bernie Sanders (I-VT).

U.S. Representative Robin Kelly (D-IL-02) plans to introduce companion legislation in the House.

The MOMMA Act has won the support of many professional medical associations and numerous health & family advocates, including the American Medical Association, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, Tobacco Free Kids, National Birth Equity Collaborative, National Partnership for Women & Families, Society for Women's Health Research, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, National League for Nursing, IL Health and Hospital Association, Association of Maternal & Child Health Program, the What to Expect Project, American College of Nurse-Midwives, IL Perinatal Quality Collaborative, Black Women's Health Imperative, MomsRising, the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, Families USA, March of Dimes, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Preeclampsia Foundation.

“Our nation's maternal mortality crisis requires urgent and bold action. We are the only high resourced nation with a rising maternal mortality rate and people of color disproportionately experience negative outcomes. The Mothers and Offspring Mortality and Morbidity Awareness Act (MOMMA) Act will improve access to care and advance quality of care for patients by extending Medicaid coverage to 12 months after delivery, helping hospitals and clinicians implement clinically proven maternal health best practices, and provide support for perinatal quality collaboratives,” said Maureen G. Phipps, MD, MPH, Chief Executive Officer of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). “With the introduction of the MOMMA Act we move one step closer to ensuring that pregnant patients receive quality prenatal, labor and delivery, and postpartum care through the critical 12 months after delivery. ACOG is proud to support this bill and thanks Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth and Representative Robin Kelly for their steadfast leadership.”

“By expanding access to health care coverage and social services for postpartum women, this bill would help change the dynamic causing the tragically high maternal mortality that disproportionately harms Black and Brown communities in the United States. The American Medical Association supports this legislation and is committed to working with Congress to tackle the issues surrounding maternal mortality and morbidity,” said Dr. Susan Bailey, American Medical Association President.

“Childbirth delivers joy, but sadly, it can also deliver risks, many of them unnecessary. The risks of a mom dying during pregnancy or in the first year of her baby’s life are greater in the U.S. than in any other developed nation. Two-thirds of those deaths are preventable with responsive, respectful high quality care, and 1/3 occur after the first 6 weeks postpartum, when too many moms receive the last doctor’s appointment they will have until they become pregnant again,” said Heidi Murkoff, Founder of the What To Expect Project. “Every maternal death is unthinkable, but every death that could have been prevented with the proper care should be considered unacceptable. That’s why the What to Expect Project and I are so proud to endorse the MOMMA Act, an essential, actionable step forward in expanding access to the care moms and babies deserve. The challenges are greater than ever – but so is the urgency of our collective responsibility to deliver that care, without exceptions, without disparities, and definitely without the arbitrary use-by dates that currently allow too many moms to fall through the cracks in maternal healthcare. We must ensure the passage of the MOMMA Act so that every mom can expect the healthy pregnancy, the safe delivery, and the healthy future she and her baby deserve. We’re grateful for the passionate leadership and tireless efforts and commitment from Senator Durbin on behalf of all our moms.”