

Urgent State Action Can Save Lives of Black Postpartum Mothers

It's a matter of life or death.

Despite the technological advances in healthcare, one of the most joyous times in a parent's life can be the most dangerous, especially for Black women.

According to the Missouri Foundation for Health, ***Missouri Black women die from pregnancy-related complications four times more often than White women.*** Black women are at risk nationally and locally.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), in 2020, the maternal mortality rate for non-Hispanic Black women was 55.3 deaths per 100,000 live births, almost three times the rate for non-Hispanic White women.

These rates are similar to those in Missouri. According to the United Health Foundation's 2016 Health of Women and Children Report, the rate of death of Missouri's Black maternal death is even higher at 65 deaths per 100,000 live births. Missouri's overall maternal mortality rate was 28.5 deaths per 100,000 live births (In 2016, Missouri ranked 42nd in the nation; the state has dropped to 44).

There's a bright spot here: we can do something about this. In 2018, the Missouri Pregnancy-Associated Mortality Review determined that 80 percent of pregnancy-related deaths that year could have been prevented. In the Show-Me-State, more than half of pregnancy-related deaths occur after 43 days postpartum. To help improve the mortality rates for Black mothers, Missouri's Maternal Mortality Review Commission has recommended that the state extend Medicaid from 60 days to one year postpartum to all pregnant people regardless of condition.

As the leader of one of the largest federally qualified health centers in Missouri, my commitment is to provide high quality healthcare to all, including those who have been traditionally excluded and underserved communities. Black mothers are dying due to maternal complications at higher rates than any other demographic group in our nation, and we can help turn this statistic around. We have an obligation to do better.

Bills introduced in last year's Missouri legislative session sought to authorize postpartum Medicaid coverage for 12 months, however, the bills were not approved. The proposed legislation has been reintroduced to the legislature in the current session. We need Missouri to extend healthcare coverage to a year postpartum for our new parents.