

URSINUS COLLEGE

A Letter in Support of Publicizing the Racial and Ethnic Disparities Among Women

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Senator Bob Casey Jr.
2000 Market St. Suite 610
Philadelphia, PA 19102

Dear Senator Casey,

We are a group of students from Ursinus College writing to urge you as a member of the Senate to advocate and promote policy to combat racial and ethnic disparities among women, particularly women of color, in healthcare. These disparities exist as a result of factors like racial bias from health care providers or socioeconomic status, and progress in the form of legislation is needed to provide justice and access to maternal health insurance.¹ Maternal health, whether it is prenatal care or postpartum, has a significant impact on countless women yet continues to be unrecognized through law. A recently introduced bill, pioneered by Representative Lauren Underwood of Illinois, addresses maternal mortality and aims to protect mothers.² We are asking you to become a sponsor of this legislation in the U.S. Senate, should the resolution pass the U.S. House.

Healthcare disparities can be dismantled only by confronting the root of the problem and understanding how minority women can be adversely affected. To demonstrate this, the Institute of Medicine in Washington, DC studied racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare through workshops and focus groups to identify the origins of inequality in the medical field. Over the course of the study, they found that disparities still exist even when insurance, income and age are similar, alluding to the role race plays in the equation. According to the Kaiser Women's Health survey, women of color are more likely to report that they are in poor health. Twenty percent of black women, twenty-nine percent of Latina women and thirteen percent of white women had indicated their health status to be either fair or poor.³ Health care providers can potentially contribute to these disparities through bias, stereotypes and prejudice, or simply the disconnect resulting from language barriers.⁴ Without the expertise of bilingual professionals

¹ Nelson, Alan. "Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care." *Journal of the National Medical Association*, vol. 94, no. 8, 2002, pp. 666-668.

² "H.R. 959: Black Maternal Health Omnibus Act of 2021." *GovTrack.us*, 8 February 2021, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/117/hr959>

³ Wyn, Roberta, and Victoria Ojeda. "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Women's Health Coverage and Access To Care Findings from the 2001 Kaiser Women's Health Survey." *Kff.Org*, 2004

⁴ Nelson, Alan.

within the system, certain individuals are unable to receive the care that they deserve - and *need* in order to maintain their health and lifestyle - due to inability to effectively communicate or learn more about the treatments presented to them.

Every woman deserves the equitable opportunity to be treated appropriately and with an increase in resources, translators and professionals we will be one step closer to a solution. Representative Underwood's bill emphasizes the importance of language interpreters with perinatal experience as well as programs to distribute resources and assistance to pregnant or postpartum patients. Racial and ethnic minorities among US health professionals are unrepresented and this bill aims to make patients feel recognized, safe, and supported through both physical *and* mental health - postpartum depression is an essential factor to consider. Maternal health is not just a matter to be confronted in Illinois; equity in healthcare is necessary across the United States, and here in Pennsylvania.

Many organizations, committees, and people like us who simply care about inequality within women's healthcare and what this means for members of our society have committed to exposing these disparities and effectuating reform. A project organized by Save Our Sisters (SOS) targeted a rural county in North Carolina with approximately two thousand middle aged black female residents.⁵ SOS aimed to discover the reasons older black women are screened at a lower rate for breast cancer, their solution being to train "natural helpers" that operate as health supporters and advisors for the patients. Women face several barriers that might interfere with proper healthcare screenings: costs as a result of lacking health insurance, doubting physician skills, and fear.⁶ Equal representation is pivotal when it comes to medical care. By training advisors of the same race, women of color are likely to feel more comfortable and represented with their decisions in treatment. Although breast cancer screenings and maternal health are two different sectors of healthcare, the protection and wellbeing of women should be universal across the system. In a national survey, about one-third of mothers felt their health concerns were not fulfilled during postpartum checkups, and their lack of knowledge about taking care of themselves during postpartum stages was present as well.⁷ Through said training, establishing speaker events, and legislation that promotes these methods, it is the hope that women will feel like their voices are listened to and valued.

Given the importance of our proposal's content and the health of many people, we ask that you acknowledge these ongoing issues of women's healthcare, defend justice, and advance new policy to benefit the people. Following in the steps of Rep. Underwood will advance the fundamental impact of maternal healthcare. We cannot continue to expect women of color and women in general to survive off of insufficient healthcare; their basic human rights should not be denied or restricted any further. We Ursinus students believe that in order to see change happen in this world, it must start with you.

⁵ Eng, Eugenia. "The Save Our Sisters Project: A Social Networking Strategy for Reaching Rural Black Women." *Cancer*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1993, pp. 1071-1077.

⁶ Eng, Eugenia.

⁷ Cheng, Fowles, Walker. "Postpartum Maternal Healthcare in the United States: a Critical Review." *The Journal of Perinatal Education*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2006: pp. 34-42.

Sincerely,

Amira Jowers, Ella Spencer, Raeann Risko, Drishti Khandelwal, and Jessica Patterson
Ursinus College

Project Proposal

Overview:

The United States has the highest maternal mortality rate among developed countries. Not having access to healthcare can force women to skip medical care due to costs. Universal healthcare could help lower maternal mortality rates by including pregnancy services, such as,

midwifery care, pre- and post-natal visits, and covering delivery costs. Connecting the issue of a lack of universal healthcare to real healthcare issues will allow for a better understanding of the benefit Americans may feel from receiving it. Legislation pushing for maternal healthcare is our focus and end goal along with better supporting our own community and pushing for an overall positive change.

Goal:

The goal of this project is awareness, advocacy and a push for support regarding maternal healthcare. Focusing on a difficult topic is necessary to understand the hardship that is experienced and to understand how we can change this. Looking at the facts allows for truth to be seen while hearing real stories opens the eyes of the audience to see that any statistic, is not *just* a number. Our goal is not only to raise awareness, but to inspire our following to see how we can be a better support system for those who have been impacted by this or those who are pregnant and concerned about maternal mortality. The kind of support we hope to encourage and train people on is the kind that would be more widespread if there was more support for change. We are all part of the positive change toward a future where maternal mortality is an uncommon occurrence, not happening largely in part to disparities in the American healthcare system. We can be part of the solution to change education and push for better healthcare that cover the disparities we see today.

Plan:

To effectively work toward our goal, we plan to build an awareness campaign beginning on social media and branching out as we build our following and awareness. We will focus on education on the topic of maternal mortality as well as the potential benefit from universal healthcare on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. These forms of social media will allow for us to engage with many people in creative ways with other local activists and advocates to a growing social media following. As we continue to post on social media and create educational flyers to post around Ursinus College and our surrounding community, we will reach out to local organizations to partner with, as we hope to spread our message and benefit from what we can learn from them. We may look to organizations such as the Norristown Planned Parenthood Center and the National Birth Equity Collaborative to work with. After establishing connections through our community, we will begin to advertise two events we plan to hold. Advertising will take place alongside our educational content on social media and along with our flyers in the community. We will look to advertise to our social media following, Ursinus College, the surrounding Collegeville community, and local colleges. We plan to hold two events which will be held online, over Zoom, to create the most safe experience while still encouraging those interested in attending. *Maternal Mission: Our Stories are Part of the Solution* will be our first event, targeted to raise awareness while sharing personal, anonymous stories submitted by those who have been impacted by this issue such as families, friends, and even children of the loved ones who passed away. Submission of stories will be ongoing during the advertising process and will be presented by our team in an anonymous form over Zoom. Our second event, *Maternal Care: Supporting Our Loved Ones*, is aimed to train support systems and others on the issue and

how to best support somebody who is pregnant or worried about maternal mortality. This would happen in conjunction with the organizations we have partnered with for the most well rounded night of training. At the end of both events, we plan to offer a petition to sign that is looking to better the maternal healthcare in Pennsylvania and support legislation similar to Illinois. Additional resources will also be offered related to information on disparities in the healthcare system, Universal Health Care, Planned Parenthood, and how to be a good support system, all of which will be created or found by our team and those who we partner with. Our hope would be to share our work, progress, and support for these changes to Senator Casey via video call.

Target Audience:

We have a number of goal target audiences. Our hope is to reach anybody who is willing to listen to our concerns and our cause. Listed below is who we plan to advertise to and work with for this project.

Mothers, families, planned parenthood employees and volunteers, healthcare workers and administration, OBGYNs, and midwives.

Budget:

Activity	Supplies	Cost
Advertising/Awareness	Printed informational flyers and handouts. Printed flyers advertising events	\$500