



The Honorable Alma Adams
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July 12, 2019

The Honorable Lauren Underwood
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The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) is grateful for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record to the Black Maternal Health Caucus's Summit. CLASP is a national nonpartisan, anti-poverty nonprofit that works to advance policy solutions for people with low incomes. We develop and advocate for federal, state and local policies to strengthen families and create pathways to education and work. Through our strategies we work to reduce poverty, promote economic opportunity, and address barriers faced by people of color. CLASP focuses on a wide range of issue areas such as childcare and early education, youth policy, job quality, income and work supports, post-secondary education, immigration and cross-cutting issues like mental health, racial equity and criminal justice.

CLASP has found, through our work in the Black maternal health space, that mental health is a critical component of maternal health. Our research has also shown that in addition to mental health, systemic racism, and poverty are key parts of the nationwide Black maternal health crisis.

Through CLASP's Moving on Maternal Depression (MOMD) initiative, we have collaborated with nine states and the District of Columbia to advance policies that improve maternal depression prevention, screening, and treatment among mothers with young children. These states are: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Oregon, Rhode Island, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Through this technical assistance project, we work across sectors to help states advance policy related to maternal depression. Throughout this project we have worked to embed racial equity and culturally relevant services into policy and systems change. Policymakers must acknowledge and confront the disparate effects of policy decisions on different racial groups to address the Black maternal health crisis and other inequities within our health care system.

CLASP recommends that the Black Maternal Health Caucus consider the following:

1. Include and integrate mental health in all conversations about maternal health.
2. Ensure that the voices and experiences of Black mothers are centered and considered when

designing policies related to the Black maternal health crisis.

3. Mandate that all legislative solutions to the Black maternal health crisis include culturally relevant practices for a diverse array of communities and that their funding streams are equitable. Members of the Caucus should think beyond traditional medical models as they look for strategies to combat this crisis.
4. Mental health services are chronically underfunded and members of the caucus must work to raise funding levels so that services can meet the needs of black mothers.

CLASP recommends that all Members of Congress need to understand the following about Black Maternal Health:

1. All members should know about and understand the racial disparities in access to care
2. Different cultures define mental health differently and it is important that we acknowledge these differences when we speak about mental health. Members should focus on using asset-based language that promotes wellness.
3. The current mental health system does not work to address stigma. It is important to acknowledge how stigma contributes to inequities in our health care system as we work to improve access to care.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the conversation about this important issue.