

Kelly, Duckworth Highlight Need For More Action To Improve Maternal Health Outcomes At M.O.M.S Tour

October 31 2023 10:28 AM



CHICAGO - U.S. Representative Robin Kelly (D-IL-02) and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) joined U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Administrator Carole Johnson this weekend for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' M.O.M.S (Maternal Outcomes Matter Showers) Tour, highlighting

their work on this important issue and the need to do more to address our country's ongoing maternal mortality crisis. This national tour aims to improve maternal health outcomes, particularly among Black women, in communities with high maternal morbidity rates, bringing together mental health professionals, birth workers, medical professionals and community members to engage in meaningful discussions on maternal health disparities and explore ways to provide resources and support for women at risk.

“In the richest country in the world, it is unacceptable that the United States continues to fail moms and babies. Black and Native women, especially, are most likely to die from pregnancy related complications because of systemic racism. I will continue to lead the charge in Congress to demand better for moms and babies,” said Kelly. “I am proud of the strides we have already made to improve outcomes, including extending the Medicaid postpartum period to a full year, but there is so much more that needs to be done. American families deserve better.”

Rep. Kelly is a longtime leader to address maternal mortality and currently serves as the Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust and co-chair of the bipartisan Maternity Care Caucus. This year, Rep. Kelly introduced the [CARE for Moms Act](#) which is a comprehensive solution to the maternal mortality crisis that will include increasing equity in maternal health grant funding, expanding the doula workforce, and establishing grants for Rural Obstetric Mobile Units to help the 2.2 million women living in maternity care deserts in the United States.

Rep. Kelly led the [MOMMAs Act](#) to address the United States' maternal health crisis. Critical elements of Kelly's MOMMAs act were signed into law, including the [Maternal Health Quality Improvement Act of 2021](#), which established a grant program under HHS to identify, develop, and disseminate best practices to improve maternal health care, and eliminate maternal mortality and morbidity. Rep. Kelly championed the permanent extension of Medicaid postpartum coverage to a full year, Illinois was the first to implement the policy and it has now been adopted by 38 states and D.C..

“It is absolutely unconscionable that hundreds of expectant and new moms are dying every year from preventable causes in one of the wealthiest countries in the world,” Duckworth said. “There is no reason why this should be our reality—especially for Black women who, in Illinois, are three times as likely to die from pregnancy-related medical conditions as white women. But this isn't some catch-22. There are real—and easy-to-implement—solutions and I'm going to keep pushing on the federal level to help end this crisis once and for all.”

“On Saturday, Senator Duckworth, Congresswoman Kelly and I had the opportunity to meet with numerous HRSA grantees doing vital work in Chicago to improve the health and well-being of moms and babies throughout the city,” said Johnson. “From funding

Healthy Start programs and Home Visiting to training Community-based Doulas and Midwives to supporting Innovations in Maternal Health, at HRSA we stand with the families of Chicago and are committed to the work of supporting safer pregnancies, eliminating health disparities, and helping families to thrive. Thank you to the community leaders who participated and to the families who joined us for this important conversation and community gathering.”

In 2021, Duckworth’s *Protecting Moms Who Served Act* was [signed into law](#), helping address the maternal mortality crisis among women Veterans by helping improve care at VA facilities and shed light on the scope of this crisis, especially among woman of color. To build upon this law, earlier this year Duckworth [introduced](#) the *Maternal Health for Veterans Act*, legislation to strengthen oversight of the VA maternity care coordination while authorizing new funding to make sure the VA has what it needs to provide more women Veterans with access to the maternal care they’ve earned through their service. And to build upon these efforts to support moms and those trying to grow their family, this week Duckworth [re-introduced](#) her *Support Through Loss Act*, a bicameral bill to increase access to resources and patient-centered care while providing 7 days of paid leave for all American workers after they experience some of the many challenges that hopeful parents face on the road to parenthood—including a miscarriage or an unsuccessful assisted reproductive technology procedure, adoption arrangement or surrogacy arrangement, or a medical diagnosis or event that impacts pregnancy or fertility.

Just this week the Illinois Department of Public Health [released](#) the third edition of its Maternal Morbidity and Mortality Report, detailing maternal health outcomes from 2018-2020. In that time, an average of 88 woman per year died while pregnant or within one year of pregnancy in Illinois. Approximately 91 percent of pregnancy-related deaths were potentially preventable due to clinical, system, social, community or patient factors. But the impact of this crisis is far greater on the Black community—Black women in Illinois were three times as likely to die from pregnancy-related medical conditions as white women.