



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lea Webb

## On Women's Equality Day We Fight for True Equality

LEA WEBB August 26, 2024

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New York State Senate  52nd District

**Op-Ed Article**

On Women's Equality Day (8/26), we commemorate the ratification in 1920 of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution granting women the right to vote, and we acknowledge the efforts of the suffragists who fought for this victory. Of course, this was just the first step toward equality, and it was only with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 that this right was made accessible to women of color. The struggle for women's equality is ongoing, as we continue to fight for equal pay, affordable childcare, reproductive rights, and access to healthcare still in 2024.

During this past year, I proudly sponsored and passed six reproductive health bills, including coverage for remote patient monitoring services, the development of a mobile application for pregnant and postpartum Medicaid recipients, and guaranteeing access to emergency contraceptives on SUNY and CUNY campuses.

As Chair of the Women's Issues Committee, I advocated for the passage of major maternal health milestones, including the Equal Rights Amendment, the Reproductive Freedom and Equity Grant Program, and Maternal Health Care and Birthing Standards workgroup. These measures will increase access to quality care, including doula and mental health care, and improve the safety and access of menstrual products.

There is much more work to do in order to achieve true equality for women, especially when it comes to maternal health outcomes. Earlier this month, Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli published a report calling for New York to do more to address the staggering rates of maternal deaths in our state ([report](#)). According to the CDC, maternal deaths increased 33% in New York during the COVID-19 pandemic, with Black women dying at four times the rate of white women.

We made strides in the FY 2025 State Budget to include funding for programs we know work to decrease unhealthy outcomes for mothers and infants. For example, we fought to include the Community Doula Expansion Grant Program, which creates a one-year program to provide funding to community-based organizations for recruitment, retention, and start-up, as well as administrative costs, to increase the number of community doulas. Additionally, we allocated \$5 million for Maternal Health Grant programs to support providers and help reduce maternal mortality rates.

I am committed to increasing access to quality maternal and reproductive health care in New York. We know that these issues disproportionately impact people of color and rural

communities, which often experience poor health outcomes. It is critical that everyone gets equitable access to comprehensive healthcare including timely prenatal care, safe birthing experiences, comprehensive postpartum care, and reproductive health services. I will keep working towards more equitable reproductive and maternal health care throughout our state.

*Senator Lea Webb Chairs the NYS Senate's Committee on Women's Issues. She represents the 52nd Senate district, which includes Cortland County, Tompkins County, and part of Broome County.*

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