



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Samra G. Brouk

Senator Brouk Announces Legislative Package to Address Maternal Mental Health Needs of New Yorkers

SAMRA G. BROUK January 20, 2022

| ISSUE: **MATERNAL DEPRESSION, MATERNAL HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, RACIAL JUSTICE**



ALBANY, NY - Senator Samra G. Brouk today announced the introduction of a package of three new bills in the Senate to address the maternal mental health needs of New Yorkers who give birth and to address the problems of underdiagnosis and undertreatment in vulnerable, at-risk populations, particularly Black and Brown women. Senator Brouk serves as the Chair of the Senate Mental Health Committee and is a member of the Senate Health committee.

Maternal mental health conditions are the most common complication in pregnancy and childbirth, affecting one in five women. The risks are **significantly higher** for new mothers of color; notably, while Black women are twice as likely to experience many of these conditions, they are half as likely to seek help. **Maternal mental health conditions** such as anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar illness and substance use disorders, can create bonding issues between a birthing parent and her baby, contribute to sleep and feeding problems, and cause mental, emotional, developmental and verbal **complications in children.**

“The most common complication in pregnancy is maternal mental health conditions, and this crisis is especially dire for Black women—our maternal mental health conditions are largely underreported and symptoms often go unaddressed,” **said Senator Samra G. Brouk.**

“Untreated maternal depression can be deadly and is causing untold suffering for too many families. We must work to address the disparity in mental health care for Black birthing people and provide more culturally responsive and respectful care.”

Senate Bill 7865 requires maternal health care providers providing pre- and postnatal care or pediatric care to invite the mother to fill out a questionnaire to detect maternal depression and other mood disorders. The bill is sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblywoman Michaëlle Solages, who serves as Chair of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus. Maternal depression screenings will be offered:

- at the time of prenatal care

- at the time of a well-child checkup prior to the infant's first birthday

- At the time of a mother's follow up visit to their OB/GYN

This bill also recommends that maternal health care providers make the best efforts possible to contact the person who gave birth within 21 days from the date of delivery and utilize industry practices to detect maternal depression.

Senate Bill 7753 requires the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) and the Department of Health **to conduct a study on the inadequacies of existing postpartum depression screening tools** in an effort to address the under-diagnosis and treatment of women in vulnerable, at-risk populations, particularly Black women. The bill is sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas.

This study will:

- Examine what additional questions or tools could be implemented to minimize disparities found within the current screening protocols.

- Identify racial disparities within existing protocols and screening measures for postpartum depression and mood disorders

- Identify ways to reduce or eliminate transgender and non-binary and racial and ethnic health care discrimination and disparities that contribute to disparities within current postpartum depression screening protocols.

Senate Bill 7752 directs OMH to create a Maternal Mental Health **Workgroup to study and issue recommendations related to the diagnosis and treatment of maternal mental health** and perinatal and postpartum mood and anxiety disorders. The bill is sponsored in the Assembly by Assemblymember Sarah Clark.

Among other tasks, the workgroup shall:

- Identify vulnerable populations and risk factors in the state for maternal mental health disorders that may occur during pregnancy and through the first postpartum year;

- Identify and recommend effective, culturally competent, and accessible prevention screening and identification and treatment strategies, including public education and workplace awareness, provider education and training, and social support services;

- Identify and recommend evidence-based practices for health care providers and public health systems;

- Make recommendations on legislation, policy initiatives, funding requirements and

budgetary priorities to address maternal mental health needs in the state.

Assemblywoman Michaëlle Solages, Chair of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic & Asian Legislative Caucus, said: "Tragic outcomes that stem from maternal depression for both the mother and the child are fully preventable, if detected. That is why I am happy to introduce this piece of legislation alongside Senator Brouk which will require maternal care providers to offer maternal depression screenings during pre and postnatal care. Only around half of mothers are screened for maternal depression - and far fewer are screened using standardized assessment tools. It is vital that mothers are screened for depression using validated assessments so that they can be connected with the care they need, to ensure the health and safety of themselves and their child."

Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas, Member of the Assembly Health Committee, said: "The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed so many of the inequities in our public health and mental health delivery system. Now more than ever, we understand that mental health matters but there is a serious mental health crisis occurring for Black and Brown mothers and people who give birth. It is exacerbated by systemic racism and sexism and we must address it if we want a healthier New York State. It is a deep injustice that Black and Brown women are more likely to experience postpartum depression compared to white women and white people who give birth and as a Latina and a health advocate, I am committed to ending these disparities. I'm proud to carry legislation with Senator Brouk, which will help us to study the inadequacies of maternal mental health screening tools for Black and Brown women and I ask my colleagues in the legislature to support the bill and help us pass it into law."

Assemblywoman Sarah Clark, Member of the Assembly Mental Health Committee, said: "Many mental health needs have gone unmet for far too long and the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the issue in our community. Maternal mental health, especially Black maternal health and other underrepresented communities is no exception and requires our immediate

attention. We must address the critical mental health needs of pregnant women and mothers across our state. As a mom of three having faced my own trauma during pregnancy and childbirth, I understand the unique challenges we face, many of which are not presently met by the healthcare system. I am proud to sponsor this legislation to better support pregnant women and postpartum mothers through the establishment of a maternal mental health workgroup. Using real data we can find common sense solutions to achieve better health outcomes. Thank you, Senator Samra Brouk for your leadership on this legislation, and your ongoing commitment to addressing the mental health needs for all New Yorkers.”

Glenn Liebman, CEO of Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc., said: “MHANYS thanks Senator Brouk and Assemblymember Solages for introducing a series of bills related to maternal mental health and postpartum depression. At MHANYS, we believe strongly in a lifetime of positive mental health starting during pregnancy and child birth. These initiatives will help create greater information regarding maternal depression screenings, public education and other resources related to maternal mental health and postpartum depression. Most importantly this legislation also looks at issues of health disparities and cultural competence—a significant concern that needs attention and support throughout the lifespan.”

Mary Bartlett, President of National Alliance on Mental Illness-New York State, said: “NAMI-NYS is grateful to Senator Brouk for shedding light on the critical and often misunderstood issues surrounding maternal mental health. As a mother who has twice experienced post-partum depression, I know both how debilitating post-partum depression can be as well as how challenging it is to talk about these issues and seek help to address them. I am proud to stand beside Senator Brouk and advocate for the four legislative measures that she is introducing which will create broader understanding, address disparities in order to increase maternal mental health screenings and normalize the conversations about maternal mental

health. I urge the legislature to pass these bills so none of New York’s mothers will have to face these issues in shame and silence.”

Kristen Garzone, Founder of The Believe KNT Foundation, Inc., said: “Maternal Mental Health has been pushed under the rug for far too long. Mothers need action and help. I suffered from postpartum depression for years with no idea how much help I truly needed. Senator Brouk's package of new Maternal Mental Health legislation is just what this state needs right now.”

According to the [Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance](#), the signs and **symptoms of maternal depression** are: feeling hopeless, helpless, or worthless; lacking motivation, concentration, or energy; loss of interest or please in activities; and feelings of anger, guilt, irritability, rage or regret. The signs and **symptoms of maternal anxiety** are: feeling easily stressed, worried or overwhelmed; being hypervigilant with the baby; having scary, intrusive, or racing thoughts; feeling keyed up, on edge, restless or panicked.

A video clip from today's press conference is available [here](#).

RELATED LEGISLATION

2021-S7865

- Introduced
- - In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- ◦ Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Relates to maternal depression screenings

January 13, 2022

In Senate Committee [Rules](#)

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Do you support this bill?

2021-S7753

- Introduced
- ◦ In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- ◦ Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Requires the office of mental health and the department of health to conduct a study on the disparate impacts regarding postpartum depression screening tests

January 10, 2022

Signed by Governor

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Do you support this bill?

2021-S7752

- Introduced
- ◦ In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- ○ On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- ○ Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Relates to the establishment of a maternal mental health workgroup

January 10, 2022

Passed Assembly

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Do you support this bill?