

HOW MANY BLACK, BROWN, & INDIGENOUS PEOPLE HAVE TO DIE GIVING BIRTH?

Racism, not race, is killing Black, Brown, and Indigenous people in our maternity care system.

In the United States, women are more likely to die from complications of pregnancy and birth than in 54 other high-resource countries, and most of these deaths are preventable. For the first time, a woman is twice as likely to die from pregnancy-related complications as her mother was a generation ago. This burden is not equally shared.

For Black, Brown, and Indigenous people, childbirth in the U.S. is often not the joyous experience that we all deserve. Black and Indigenous women are two to three times more likely than white women to die from complications of pregnancy and birth and are also more likely to experience near misses or severe complications. One in three people of color giving birth in a hospital reports experiencing disrespectful care or mistreatment.

Too often, Black, Brown, and Indigenous people are denied equal access to respectful, high-quality maternity care that is free from bias and discrimination. In maternity care units across the country, they are treated with condescension, disregard, neglect, and fear-based coercion. When asserting their rights to informed consent, bodily autonomy, and self-determination, they are subject to surveillance and policing under the same systems of structural racism that discriminate, control, and criminalize.

For Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, we can't talk about birth equity without also talking about state-sanctioned violence and police brutality. These injustices that start at birth took the lives of **Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, George Floyd, Shantel Davis, Tony McDade, Nina Pop, Breonna Taylor, as well as Erica Garner, Shalon Irving, Kira Johnson, Amber Rose Isaac, Sha-Asia Washington**, and too many other Black people who were victims of medical racism in the maternal health care system. **That's why Birth Justice Matters.**

We need action rooted in Reproductive Justice.

Founded by 12 women of color in 1994, Reproductive Justice is a movement-building and organizing framework that identifies how reproductive oppression is a result of the intersection of multiple oppressions and is inherently connected to the struggle for social justice and human rights. The movement addresses the intersectional needs of Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, as birth injustice is never just about access to equitable health care but the intersecting systems of inequities, such as housing, incarceration, food apartheid, child protective services, unprovoked violence, environmental injustices, and more.

Quality, equitable, and respectful care in childbirth is an essential human right. It's not enough to just talk about health equity. This is not just about implicit bias or the racism of individual providers. We need a complete systematic overhaul of the full spectrum of reproductive health care and maternity care within the U.S. **Our hospitals, health care systems, and health insurance companies must be accountable to the people and communities they serve, center patients as experts in their care, and honor patients' rights to make decisions about their own bodies.**

We envision a reality where:

- The human rights of all people to decide whether to have or not have children and to parent children in safe and sustainable communities are protected, respected, and fulfilled, regardless of where they live or their health insurance coverage.
- All people have meaningful options regarding where, how, and with whom they will give birth and can expect respectful, person-centered, anti-racist models of care.
- Midwives, doulas, and perinatal support services are fully integrated into maternity care, and all health care professions reflect the diversity of the patients they serve.
- Transformative justice remedies, like community tribunals, are available when human rights violations, obstetric violence, and mistreatment occur in health care settings.

We demand systemic change that is grounded in reproductive justice and promotes an anti-racist model of health care. This begins with:

• **Passing the Black Maternal Health Omnibus Act (H.R. 6142/S.3424) in Congress** which includes:

1. Investing in the social determinants of health, like housing, transportation, child care, and nutrition.
2. Funding community-based and community birth organizations working to improve maternal health outcomes for Black and Indigenous women.
3. Growing, diversifying, and strengthening the perinatal workforce to ensure that all people can receive maternity care and support from people they trust.
4. Implementing education on bias, racism, and discrimination for providers in maternity care settings.
5. Promoting innovative payment models to incentivize high-quality maternity care and continuous insurance coverage for pregnant and postpartum people.

• **Advancing legislative proposals, like the BREATHE Act**, recently unveiled by the Movement for Black Lives, Congresswoman Pressley, and Congresswoman Tlaib, to divest from the system of over-policing Black, Brown, and Indigenous people and instead invest in new approaches to maintain safe and sustainable communities for all people.

• Providing legal guarantees to respectful, non-discriminatory maternity care and transparent mechanisms that **hold health systems and government accountable for incidents of obstetric violence, mistreatment, and human rights violations in childbirth.**

• Redirecting resources to **amplify, promote, and implement solutions developed by Black, Brown, and Indigenous leaders** addressing maternal health disparities, including protecting and supporting Black and Indigenous birth workers who are effectively serving their communities including midwives and doulas.

• Transforming training requirements for all health professionals to deliver **anti-racist, culturally humble care** rooted in human rights.

As leaders, organizations, and allies in the birth and reproductive justice movements, we call for institutional and governmental accountability for birth justice and legal guarantees for safe, respectful, anti-racist care, starting today. Now is the time to show to the world that birth justice matters.

Signed:

Ancient Song Doula Services
Village Birth International
Every Mother Counts
Birth Rights Bar Association
Black Mamas Matter Alliance
Center for Reproductive Rights
Changing Woman Initiative
Commonsense Childbirth
Elephant Circle
Foundation for the Advancement of Midwifery
If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice
MomsRising
Movement for Family Power
National Advocates for Pregnant Women
National Association to Advance Black Birth
National Birth Equity Collaborative
National Black Midwives Alliance
National Perinatal Taskforce
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WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Visit birthjusticenow.org for actions you can take:

Call on Congress to pass the Black Maternal Health Omnibus Act and introduce the Breathe Act.

Share your experience giving birth and report obstetric violence, mistreatment, and human rights violations in childbirth.

Sign-on and add your voice to these calls to action.

PAID FOR BY

EVERY MOTHER COUNTS