



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: State Senator Felzkowski, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Insurance and Small Business

FROM: Tia Westhoff, Associate Director for Human Life and Social Concerns

DATE: March 29, 2023

RE: SB 110, Extension of eligibility under the Medical Assistance program for postpartum women

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the state's Catholic bishops, urges you to support Senate Bill 110, which extends critical medical assistance to women for a full year after giving birth.

As Catholics, we believe every public policy should be measured by how it affects the life and dignity of the human person, especially prioritizing the needs of those living in poverty, those who are on the margins, and those who suffer the injustice of racism. Catholic teaching holds that every member of the human family must be respected from conception until natural death and have the opportunity to participate as fully as possible in the life of the community.

This is why the WCC continues to support extending postpartum coverage, prioritizing the well-being of women and children. And right now, in our state, women are losing critical healthcare coverage at a time when they need it the most.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), an increasing number of pregnant women in the U.S. suffer from serious conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension.¹ Left untreated, these chronic conditions can endanger women's lives after giving birth. Tragically, the U.S. has the highest maternal mortality rate among developed countries.² Chronic conditions, suicide, and drug overdoses are the major drivers of this high mortality rate. And the sobering fact is that, according to the CDC, four out of five of these maternal deaths could be prevented.³

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternal-mortality/pregnancy-mortality-surveillance-system.htm>

² Vestal, Christine. *More States Extend Postpartum Medicaid Since Roe's Demise*, September 20, 2022. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2022/09/20/more-states-extend-postpartum-medicaid-since-roes-demise>

³ Ibid.

Further, we know that postpartum coverage is especially critical for women of color. Black, American Indian, and Alaskan Native women are two to three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women.⁴

Postpartum women are also at higher risk for depression, which if not properly treated can lead to chronic depressive disorder. Maternal depression has profound effects on children, often manifesting in emotional and behavioral problems such as sleeping and eating difficulties, excessive crying, and delays in language development.⁵

If Wisconsin mothers thrive, Wisconsin children thrive too. Wisconsin Medicaid currently pays for more than four in ten births, a clear indication that there are many vulnerable women and children in our state.⁶ This extension will be life-changing for our most vulnerable families and a commonsense investment in the future of Wisconsin.

We know that in Wisconsin, 75 percent of pregnancy-associated deaths occur postpartum.⁷ Something has to change.

It is very heartening to see the incredible number of legislators who have signed onto this bill and the many groups gathered here in support of this bipartisan legislation. We ask that, at this moment in history, we all redouble our efforts to support women and children, for their sake and that of the common good.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Infographic: Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Pregnancy-Related Deaths—United States, 2007–2016. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternal-mortality/disparities-pregnancy-related-deaths/infographic.html>

⁵ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Maternal Depression Can Undermine the Development of Young Children: Working Paper No. 8, 2009. www.developingchild.harvard.edu

⁶ State of Wisconsin Department of Health Services. *Request to Extend Postpartum Coverage for Eligible Medicaid Members from 60 Days to 90 Days Under a Section 1115 Demonstration Waiver*, June 3, 2022. <https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/medicaid/postpartum-coverage-waiver-final-application.pdf>

⁷ Wisconsin Department of Health Services. 2016-17 Wisconsin Maternal Mortality Report, April 2022. <https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p03226.pdf>