



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Rachael Cabral-Guevara, Chair  
Members, Senate Committee on Health

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

DATE: February 12, 2025

RE: SB 23, Extension of eligibility under the MA 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 23, 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 hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease.<sup>1</sup> Left unmonitored, these chronic conditions can endanger women's lives after giving birth. Tragically, the U.S. has a very high maternal mortality rate among developed countries. 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.<sup>2</sup>

Further, we know that postpartum coverage is especially critical for women of color. In 2022 and 2023, black women were two to three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women.<sup>3</sup>

We also know that in Wisconsin, 75 percent of pregnancy-associated deaths occur postpartum.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, many pregnancy-related deaths in Wisconsin in 2020 coincided with mental health and substance use disorders.<sup>5</sup> Losing coverage at this time could prove devastating.

It is an understatement to say that postpartum women have a lot on their plate and are also at higher risk for depression. 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.<sup>6</sup>

If Wisconsin mothers thrive, Wisconsin children thrive too. We know that Wisconsin Medicaid has been paying for more than four in ten births, a clear indication that there are many vulnerable women and children in our state.<sup>7</sup> This extension will be life-changing for our most vulnerable families and a commonsense investment in the future of Wisconsin.

It is very heartening to see the great number of legislators who have signed onto this bipartisan bill and the many groups gathered here in support. We strongly urge you to support this essential legislation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System, 2024.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/maternal-mortality/php/pregnancy-mortality-surveillance/>

<sup>2</sup> CDC, Four in 5 pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. are preventable, 2022.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p0919-pregnancy-related-deaths.html>

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2023.  
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2023/maternal-mortality-rates-2023.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. 2016-17 Wisconsin Maternal Mortality Report, April 2022.  
<https://dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p03226.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Wisconsin Maternal Mortality Review Team Recommendations, 2020.  
<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02108-2020.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> 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](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu)

<sup>7</sup> 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>