



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Health  
In Support of H.1949/S.1334 An Act to reduce racial disparities in maternal health  
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The League of Women Voters envisions an affordable health care system that provides equal access to quality health care for all. This vision includes access to quality pregnancy-related healthcare for childbearing individuals, regardless of race. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports H.1949/S.1334 because we believe that this legislation creates the forum necessary to study racial disparities in maternal health in the Commonwealth, identify variables leading to these unequal outcomes, and offer proposals for solutions to address this major public health challenge.

Racial and ethnic disparities in maternal mortality are a significant public health issue in the United States, which has one of the highest maternal mortality rates among wealthy countries, and is the only industrialized country where the rate is increasing.<sup>1</sup> Black women are 3 to 4 times more likely than white women to die from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes<sup>2</sup> such as embolism, hemorrhage, infection, cardiomyopathy and hypertensive disorders. A mother's death has a profound negative effect on her family and community. Reducing preventable maternal morbidity and mortality benefits women, children and the Commonwealth.

Currently, the Massachusetts Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee (MMMRC) reviews the deaths of all women who die while pregnant or within one year of the end of pregnancy, irrespective of cause.<sup>3</sup> The proposed legislation would go a step further, creating a commission that would focus on the unique circumstances surrounding maternal mortality among women of color. Commission members would include experts in the field of maternal health, healthcare administrators, elected officials, members of racial justice organizations, healthcare providers, those who have lost an immediate family member to maternal death, and others. At the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, we think this is the correct approach.

LWVMA, which represents 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, urges you to report H.1949/S.1334 favorably. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, *Women's Health Care Physicians: Maternal Mortality*. <https://www.acog.org/About-ACOG/ACOG-Departments/Government-Relations-and-Outreach/Federal-Legislative-Activities/Maternal-Mortality?IsMobileSet=false>. Accessed September 1, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Petersen EE, Davis NL, Goodman D, et al. *Vital Signs: Pregnancy-Related Deaths, United States, 2011–2015, and Strategies for Prevention, 13 States, 2013–2017*. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2019; 68:423–429.  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6818e1external icon>. Accessed September 1, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> The MMMRC was appointed in 1997 by the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) to review maternal deaths, study the incidence of pregnancy complications, and make recommendations to improve maternal outcomes and prevent mortality. The work of the committee is protected under M.G.L. c. 111, section 24A and 24B.