

COMBATING POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION: SEN. MENENDEZ BEGINS PUSH IN 111TH CONGRESS

MOTHERS Act reintroduced in Senate, was close to passage last year

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) today officially kicked off his efforts to secure an increased federal commitment to combating postpartum depression by reintroducing the Melanie Blocker Stokes MOTHERS Act in the Senate. The legislation, which is co-sponsored by Sens. Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME), has support from Senate leadership. It was nearing passage last year, despite being blocked from a vote on the Senate floor by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK), who has objected to this and other bills targeting specific diseases on ideological grounds.

“We gained significant support for this effort to combat postpartum depression over the last two years, which makes me optimistic that we will be able to deliver this gift to new mothers,” said Senator Menendez. “Increasingly, my colleagues in the Senate are learning about the vicious, debilitating nature of postpartum depression and how it affects families, and they understand why this initiative is so important. We have to attack postpartum depression on all fronts – with education, support, and research – so that new moms can feel supported and safe rather than scared and alone.”

Postpartum depression is a serious and disabling condition affecting hundreds of thousands of new mothers each year. The new legislation would increase federal efforts to combat postpartum depression by:

- Encouraging Health and Human Services (HHS) to coordinate and continue research to expand the understanding of the causes of, and find treatments for, postpartum conditions.
- Encouraging a National Public Awareness Campaign, to be administered by HHS, to increase awareness and knowledge of postpartum depression and psychosis.
- Requiring the Secretary of HHS to conduct a study on the benefits of screening for postpartum depression and postpartum psychosis.
- Creating a grant program to public or nonprofit private entities to deliver or enhance outpatient, inpatient and home-based health and support services, including case management and comprehensive treatment services for individuals with or at risk for postpartum conditions. Activities may also include providing education about postpartum conditions to new mothers and their families, including symptoms, methods of coping with the illness, and treatment resources, in order to promote earlier diagnosis and treatment.

It is estimated that postpartum depression (PPD) affects from 10 to 20 percent of new mothers. In the United States, there may be as many as 800,000 new cases of postpartum conditions each year. The cause of PPD isn't known but changes in hormone levels, a difficult pregnancy or birth, and a family history of depression are considered possible factors.

The Melanie Blocker Stokes MOTHERS Act (S. / H.R. 20)

The Melanie Blocker Stokes MOTHERS Act, sponsored by Senator Menendez and Representative Rush, will help provide support services to women suffering from postpartum depression and psychosis and will also help educate mothers and their families about these conditions. In addition, it will support research into the causes, diagnoses and treatments for postpartum depression and psychosis.

Specifically this bill will:

Increase Research on Postpartum Depression

- Encourages Health and Human Services (HHS) to coordinate and continue research to expand the understanding of the causes of, and find treatments for, postpartum conditions.
- Encourages a National Public Awareness Campaign, to be administered by HHS, to increase awareness and knowledge of postpartum depression and psychosis.
- Requires the Secretary of HHS to conduct a study on the benefits of screening for postpartum depression and postpartum psychosis.
- Includes a Sense of Congress that the Director of the National Institutes of Health may conduct a nationally representative longitudinal study of the relative mental health consequences for women of resolving a pregnancy (intended or unintended) in various ways, including carrying the pregnancy to term and parenting the child, carrying the pregnancy to term and placing the child for adoption, miscarriage, and having an abortion.

Support Those Struggling with Postpartum Depression

- Creates a grant program to public or nonprofit private entities to deliver or enhance outpatient, inpatient and home-based health and support services, including case management and comprehensive treatment services for individuals with or at risk for postpartum conditions. Activities may also include providing education about postpartum conditions to new mothers and their families, including symptoms, methods of coping with the illness, and treatment resources, in order to promote earlier diagnosis and treatment.

Funding

- Authorizes \$3,000,000 for fiscal year 2009; and such sums as may be necessary for fiscal years 2010 and 2011.

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Understanding Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression is a devastating mood disorder which strikes many women during and after pregnancy. It is a serious and disabling condition that affects anywhere from 10 to 20 percent of new mothers. In the United States, there may be as many as 800,000 new cases of postpartum conditions each year. These mothers often experience signs of depression and may lose interest in friends and family, feel overwhelming sadness or even have thoughts of harming the baby or themselves. The cause of postpartum depression is not known, but changes in hormone levels, a difficult pregnancy or birth, a family history of depression and other biopsychosocial stressors are considered possible factors.

Supporters

American College of Nurse Midwives
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Psychological Association
American Psychiatric Association
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Children's Defense Fund
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Family Mental Health Foundation
Guttmacher
Kristin Brooks Hope Center
March of Dimes
Melanie Blocker Stokes Foundation
Mental Health America
NARAL, Pro-Choice America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Partnership for Women & Families
National Women's Law Center
OWL- The Voice of Midlife and Older Women
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Postpartum Support International
Suicide Prevention Action Network USA