

2019 Regular Session

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 240

BY SENATOR CARTER

HEALTH CARE. Requests the Louisiana Department of Health to take immediate action to address racial disparity in maternal and child health outcomes and the alarming rate of mortality for African-American infants and mothers in Louisiana.

1 A RESOLUTION

2 To urge and request the Louisiana Department of Health to take immediate action to address
3 racial disparity in maternal and child health outcomes and the alarming rate of
4 mortality for African-American infants and mothers in Louisiana.

5 WHEREAS, the United States ranks thirty-second out of thirty-five of the world's
6 wealthiest nations in infant mortality, and Louisiana has the fourth highest infant mortality
7 rate in the country; and

8 WHEREAS, according to research by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, low
9 birth weight is a significant factor in infant death and the number of low-birth-weight babies
10 born in the United States is increasing at a rate greater than in other comparable countries,
11 based largely on the unsettling data for African-American infants; and

12 WHEREAS, African-American infants are now more than twice as likely to die as
13 white infants, with a death rate of eleven out of one thousand African-American infants
14 dying as compared to five out of every one thousand white infants, which results in more
15 than four thousand unnecessarily lost African-American infants each year; and

16 WHEREAS, based on a survey of United States government data, racial disparity in
17 infant mortality rates is astonishingly wider now than in 1850, thirteen years before the
18 signing of the Emancipation Proclamation; and

1 WHEREAS, the United States is one of only thirteen countries in the world where
2 the rate of maternal mortality, the death of a woman related to pregnancy or childbirth, is
3 worse now than it was twenty-five years ago, with an estimated seven hundred to nine
4 hundred maternal deaths annually; and

5 WHEREAS, according to the United States Centers for Disease Control and
6 Prevention, African-American women are three to four times as likely to die from
7 pregnancy-related causes as their white counterparts; and

8 WHEREAS, studies over the past twenty-five years show that education and income
9 are not key determinants in this alarming trend as an African-American woman with an
10 advanced college degree is more likely to lose her baby than a white woman with less than
11 an eighth-grade education; and

12 WHEREAS, recently there has been a growing acknowledgment among researchers
13 and healthcare professionals that the debilitating effects of societal and systemic racism have
14 created a toxic physiological stress for African-American women, causing health problems
15 such as hypertension and pre-eclampsia that directly lead to higher rates of infant and
16 maternal death that are more reflective of the lived experience of race in this country as
17 opposed to the genetics of race; and

18 WHEREAS, researchers have also indicated that there is a pervasive, longstanding
19 racial bias in healthcare that results in the dismissal of legitimate concerns and symptoms
20 of African-American women during pregnancy which may result in misdiagnosis of
21 conditions that can be fatal to the mother and infant; and

22 WHEREAS, national attention is now being given to the undeniable inequality and
23 racial disparity in infant and maternal birth outcomes and Louisiana statistical data confirms
24 that despite access to prenatal healthcare, African-American infants in Louisiana are more
25 than twice as likely to die as white infants, with more than twelve African-American infant
26 deaths per one thousand live births as compared to five white infant deaths per one thousand
27 live births, the worst ranking in the United States; and

28 WHEREAS, these outcomes are utterly reprehensible and there is no time to waste
29 studying this matter further as each day represents a chilling risk of losing yet another
30 African-American infant or mother in our state; and

1 WHEREAS, the current secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health, Dr.
2 Rebekah Gee, is an obstetrician/gynecologist, and a trained policy expert who has served in
3 numerous state and national policy roles, and prior to being appointed secretary, came to
4 Louisiana to serve as the director for the Birth Outcomes Initiative where she led the charge
5 to reduce unnecessary early caesarian section births; and

6 WHEREAS, Secretary Gee is the ideal expert to take a leadership role in this matter
7 and implement, through the many programs in her department, immediate and tangible
8 initiatives to protect the lives of African-American infants and mothers in Louisiana.

9 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana
10 does hereby request the Louisiana Department of Health to take immediate action to address
11 racial disparity in maternal and child health outcomes and the alarming rate of mortality for
12 African-American infants and mothers in Louisiana.

13 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Secretary Gee's medical and policy expertise,
14 the expertise of the many offices under her authority, including the bureaus and divisions
15 within the office of public health and Medicaid, and the countless contacts she has both
16 locally, nationally, and internationally make her department the ideal agency leader to
17 champion this effort.

18 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the department take immediate actions within
19 its jurisdiction and control, through an organized effort of healthcare, community, and
20 religious professionals, or through regulatory action considered appropriate, to implement
21 measures to combat this crisis, including requiring healthcare professional diversity
22 sensitivity training, increasing access to home visits and doulas, and any other measure
23 considered appropriate.

24 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that on or before August 1, 2019, the department
25 submit a summary report to the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana identifying the
26 immediate actions being taken to address mortality outcomes for African-American infants
27 and mothers in Louisiana.

28 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that on or before October 1, 2019, the department
29 host a summit on this matter to gather representatives from a vast network of expertise in
30 one setting to ensure that proper attention is given to this crisis and to chart a pathway

