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GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL

**GOVERNOR HOCHUL UNVEILS THIRD PROPOSAL OF 2024 STATE OF THE STATE: TAKING ON THE MATERNAL AND INFANT MORTALITY CRISIS**

***Establish First-In-The-Nation Statewide Paid Prenatal Leave; Studies Show Prenatal Doctors Appointments Are Tied To Better Health Outcomes For Moms And Babies***

***New Legislation Will Expand Access To Doula Services, Establish Standing Order For Evidence-Based Services That Save Lives***

***Eliminate Out-Of-Pocket Medical Costs for Pregnancy-Related Benefits For New Yorkers Who Rely On Essential Plan And Other Qualified Health Plans***

***Reduce Unnecessary C-Sections That Put Mothers At Risk, Increasing Accountability For Providers Through New Data Monitoring And Financial Incentives***

***Deploy New Training And Resources For Maternal Mental Health Through 988 Hotline And Expansion Of Project TEACH***

***New Initiative Will Fund Portable Cribs For Low-Income Families To Reduce The Risk Of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome***

***CDC Statistics Show Shocking Spike In Infant Mortality – First Increase In Two Decades***

Governor Kathy Hochul today unveiled the third proposal of her 2024 State of the State: a comprehensive six-point plan to combat maternal and infant mortality in New York. Recent CDC statistics revealed an increase in infant mortality – for the first time in over two decades. To address this crisis, Governor Hochul will introduce new policies and legislation to expand access to high-quality prenatal care, reduce costs for mothers and families, fight postpartum depression and support infants in the first months of their lives.

“Make no mistake: we are facing a maternal and infant mortality crisis,” **Governor Hochul said.** “As New York’s first mom governor, this is personal to

me. We are committed to tackling this crisis head-on with policies that lift up parents and children throughout the State of New York.”

“In New York, we refuse to accept the maternal and infant mortality crisis - we’re taking action to ensure women and babies have the lifesaving healthcare options and services they deserve,” **said Lieutenant Governor Antonio Delgado.** “This is how we address existing disparities and support families statewide. We will proudly lead the way.”

### **Creating First-In-The-Nation Statewide Paid Prenatal Leave**

Governor Hochul will expand New York’s nation-leading statewide [Paid Family Leave policy](#) (PFL) to include 40 hours of paid leave to attend prenatal medical appointments – making New York the first state in the nation to establish statewide coverage for prenatal care. [Studies show](#) that prenatal health care is highly correlated with improved health outcomes for mothers and infants; pregnant mothers who have access to regular prenatal medical visits are less likely to die in childbirth and their newborns are more likely to be healthy.

Under New York’s current paid family leave law, short-term disability benefits are not available until 4 weeks prior to the child’s birth after a seven-day waiting period. Adding prenatal care as a separate qualifying event under PFL will enable pregnant workers to ensure their medical needs are met without sacrificing their ability to support the household, or paid leave available for bonding following the birth.

This builds on Governor Hochul’s recent actions to support new parents and improve maternal health outcomes including offering 12 weeks of [fully paid parental leave benefits to more than 80 percent of the state workforce](#) and [extending postpartum coverage for up to a full year](#) after the end of a pregnancy for Medicaid and Child Health Plus enrollees.

### **Expanding Access To Doula Care Through Standing Order**

Governor Hochul will introduce legislation in her Executive Budget that would enable the Commissioner of Health to issue a "standing order" allowing New Yorkers to utilize doula services without a referral from a physician. Doulas are birthing experts who provide physical, emotional and informational support before, during, and after the child-birthing experience. By issuing a “standing order” for doula coverage, New York will eliminate an unnecessary hurdle for pregnant mothers to cross, especially low-income mothers who rely on Medicaid for health insurance coverage.

In last year’s budget, Governor Hochul secured doula coverage for Medicaid enrollees in New York, a change which took effect earlier this week on January 1. She also signed a new law creating the [first New York State directory of doulas](#).

### **Eliminate Co-Pays And Other Out-Of-Pocket Costs For Essential Plan And Qualified Health Plans**

To reduce barriers to access for maternal and infant health care, Governor Hochul will eliminate cost-sharing – including co-pays and other out-of-pocket costs – for

pregnancy-related benefits for any New Yorker enrolled in the Essential Plan or Qualified Health Plans. Governor Hochul will also expand coverage for doulas within the Essential Plan.

Even for New Yorkers with robust health insurance coverage, co-pays and other cost-sharing are significant barriers that prevent pregnant and postpartum individuals from getting the care they need. While the approximately 7 million New Yorkers on Medicaid already benefit from low to no cost-sharing, approximately 1.3 million New Yorkers enrolled in the Essential Plan and Qualified Health Plans still face cost barriers to accessing routine pregnancy-related care.

### **New Oversight Mechanisms To Avoid Unnecessary C-Sections**

Cesarean births (or C-Sections) should be utilized only when the procedure is determined to be the best approach for the mother or the baby. However, some doctors perform these surgeries more frequently than clinical best practices recommend. While this can be for a variety of reasons, one factor is that it is often more profitable to perform a C-section, even when doing so is not necessary for the patient.

To address this critical issue, Governor Hochul has directed the Department of Health to launch new initiatives to reduce the rate of unnecessary C-sections. This will include new oversight measures to identify physicians whose behavior is out of line with clinical best practices, allowing the Department of Health to hold providers – including those overutilizing C-sections – accountable. It also includes a new Medicaid financial incentives for hospitals to reduce the number of unnecessary C-sections.

### **Address Maternal Mental Health And Post-Partum Depression**

According to CDC data, approximately one in five pregnancy-related deaths (23 percent) are due to mental health conditions, and approximately one in eight women who have recently given birth experience postpartum depression. Maternal mental health conditions rank among the leading causes of maternal mortality in New York.

New York will train counselors answering the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline on issues related to maternal mental health, postpartum depression, and anxiety. This specialized training will ensure counselors will provide the compassionate care, support, and resources necessary to help mothers and birthing parents experiencing mental health distress. Starting in 2022, Governor Hochul helped successfully implement the [988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) –formerly called the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – throughout the state.

In addition, Project TEACH's Maternal Mental Health initiative will expand to include support for additional patient-facing professions, such as therapists, lactation consultants, WIC staff, home visiting nurses, and other frontline practitioners so they may receive specialized training and access expert consultation to provide mental health support to the pregnant and postpartum New Yorkers they assist. This initiative is part of an existing training resource aimed at increasing treatment efficacy among

prescribers, including general psychiatrists, primary care doctors, nurse practitioners, OB-GYNs, and others who may lack adequate maternal mental health expertise.

### **Reducing The Risk Of Sudden Unexpected Infant Deaths (SUID)**

Unsafe sleep deaths are the most common type of preventable child fatalities that come to the attention of state officials. Each week, roughly two infants die in an unsafe sleep setting, resulting in [more than 120 infant deaths per year](#). Sometimes this is due to a lack of access to safety-approved cribs, particularly for low-income families.

Since safe sleep environments are crucial for reducing the risk of sleep-related deaths, Governor Hochul will provide funding for the distribution of portable cribs for under resourced New Yorkers at no cost. The cribs would be available to families via local county departments of social services and other local organizations. Medical professionals at birthing hospitals will also facilitate referrals where a need for a crib is identified.

**New York State Health Commissioner Dr. James McDonald said,** “Under Governor Hochul’s leadership, New York State has significantly enhanced its maternal health agenda. These nation leading state of the state priorities not only protect maternal mental health, they aim to minimize unnecessary c-sections. They also reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), establish paid prenatal leave, expand doula services, and eliminate copays and out of pocket maternal and infant medical costs for Medicaid members, providing families with emotional support during pregnancy, delivery and following birth.”

### **OCFS Acting Commissioner Suzanne Miles-Gustave**

**said,** “Governor Hochul continues to put the well-being of families first, and we are so grateful for this package of proposals that will provide them even greater protections. Our precious children are only able to thrive when their caregivers are given the necessary treatments and resources for healthy development both before and after birth. Once again, New York is proving itself to be a pioneer in maternal health, and we are excited to help lead these life-saving initiatives.”

**State Office of Mental Health Commissioner Dr. Ann Sullivan said,** “Pregnancy and childbirth are major life-changing events that can sometimes pose unique mental health challenges or exacerbate preexisting conditions. By providing specialized training to the professionals most likely to interact with these individuals and by ensuring our counselors at the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline are versed in maternal mental health, we can offer the additional support New Yorkers can rely on to maintain their mental wellbeing before and after their delivery. I applaud Governor Hochul for continuing to focus on maternal mortality and for providing these critical resources to help mothers statewide.”

**Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn said,** “We need urgent action to combat the infant and maternal mortality crisis, and our Governor continues to step up to the plate with a six-point plan to make motherhood safer for all,”

said Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn. “As a survivor of maternal loss, I am committed to working with Governor Kathy Hochul to combat the shocking spike in infant mortality rates that are rising for the first time in decades while disproportionately devastating our Black and minority communities so all mothers and babies can not only survive, but thrive.”

**New York City Council Speaker Adrienne E. Adams said,** “Racial disparities in New York’s maternal health outcomes remain glaring, underscoring the importance of urgent actions from all levels of government to confront this crisis. The New York City Council is proud to have prioritized this issue, enacting 11 new laws to expand access to doula care and other critical services for birthing people. I’m encouraged by Governor Hochul’s focus on investing in solutions to ensure pregnant people, mothers, and infants are safe and supported.”

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