



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives
State House, Boston 02133-1054

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Rep. Smola supports legislative commission to address racial inequities in maternal health

BOSTON – Representative Todd M. Smola (R-Warren, Ranking Member, Committee on Ways & Means) recently joined with his House colleagues to support the establishment of a special legislative commission to address racial disparities in maternal health care.

House Bill 4818, *An Act to reduce racial inequities in maternal health*, was engrossed by the House of Representatives on a vote of 159-0 on June 30.

In Massachusetts, a black woman is twice as likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than a white woman. Representative Smola said the commission created under House Bill 4818 will work to identify the causes of these racial disparities, and to develop recommendations to address them.

The 25-member commission will be co-chaired by the House and Senate chairs of the Joint Committee on Public Health, and will also include the committee's ranking minority members from both legislative branches, the Commissioner of Public Health, the Executive Director of the Health Policy Commission, and the Chair of the Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus.

Members of the commission must have knowledge, expertise or experience related to maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity and must reflect the Commonwealth's broad racial and geographic diversity, with the majority of the members coming from black and brown communities and representing the communities that are most impacted by inequities in maternal health outcomes. House Bill 4818 defines "maternal mortality" as the death of a woman during pregnancy or within one year of the end of the pregnancy.

The commission will be charged with investigating:

- best practices for reducing or eliminating racial inequities in maternal mortality or severe maternal morbidity;
- barriers to accessing prenatal and postpartum care;
- how historical and current forms of racism affect the prevalence of maternal morbidity;
- the availability of data collected by the Commonwealth, and what additional data is needed;
- limitations in defining severe maternal morbidity;
- the availability, affordability, and adequacy of insurance coverage;
- relevant findings from the Health Policy Commission; and
- any other factors the commission determines to be relevant.

Representative Smola said the commission will be required to file a report with its findings and recommendations within one year of the bill's effective date.

House Bill 4818 now heads to the Senate for its consideration. For additional information please contact Representative Smola at Todd.Smola@mahouse.gov or (617)722-2100.

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