



Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc.

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Memorandum in Support

S.7753 (Brouk)/A.9102 (Gonzalez-Rojas)

AN ACT to require the office of mental health and the department of health to conduct a study on the disparate impacts regarding postpartum depression screening tests

The Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS) strongly supports S.7753/A.9102, which would help identify and correct existing disparities in how health and mental health providers screen for and treat maternal mental health conditions, including screening methods that will more accurately detect maternal depression in black and brown women, as well as in nonbinary and transmasculine gestational parents. Specifically, the bill would require a group of postpartum experts to conduct a comprehensive study and prepare a report on the differential impacts of postpartum depression screening measures in relation to black and brown women and birthing people.

Maternal mental health conditions are the most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth, affecting 1 in 5 women and childbearing people during the perinatal timeframe (during pregnancy and first year postpartum). Left undetected and untreated, these illnesses can have long-term negative impact on parents, babies, family, and society. Research supports that screening pregnant and postpartum women for depression can significantly reduce the symptoms of depression. However, significant disparities exist along racial dimensions with regard to postpartum mental health screening. A large 2020 studyⁱ published in *Archives of Women's Mental Health* found that women of color, including African-American, Asian-American, Native American, multiracial and other non-white individuals, are less likely to be screened for depression, compared with white women, during the postpartum period. As a result, nearly 60 percent of Black and Latina mothers do not receive any treatment or support services for prenatal and postpartum emotional complications. Furthermore, postpartum depression is 40 percent greater in Latina mothers and 80 percent greater in Black mothers living in small cities and rural communities compared to their white counterparts.

MHANYS believes that proper, timely and equitable postpartum mental health screening is imperative and is a necessary precursor to adequate mental health treatment. This legislation will help address this disparity in maternal mental health screening. For these reasons MHANYS strongly supports S.7753/A.9102. In addition, MHANYS further recommends that complimentary maternal mental health legislation including S.7752/A.9085 and S.7865/A.5076-A also pass into law. Taken together, these bills represent a comprehensive approach to addressing maternal mental health in New York State.

ⁱ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00737-020-01035-x>