

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2023

SENATE RESOLUTION

RECOGNIZING MARCH 14, 2023, AS "BLACK MIDWIVES DAY" TO SHED LIGHT ON THE HISTORY, POLITICS, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY OF BLACK MIDWIFERY IN THE CONTEXT OF A NATIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT MATERNAL HEALTH, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF MIDWIFERY CARE AS AN ESSENTIAL STRATEGY IN REDUCING MATERNAL MORTALITY AND MORBIDITY AMONG BLACK BIRTHING PEOPLE

Introduced By: Senators Mack, Cano, Lawson, Ujifusa, Picard, Murray, Sosnowski, Euer, Lauria, and F. Lombardi

Date Introduced: March 16, 2023

Referred To: Recommended for Immediate Consideration

1 WHEREAS, Recognizing the day of March 14, 2023, as "Black Midwives Day"  
2 underscores the importance of midwifery in helping to achieve better maternal health outcomes  
3 by addressing fundamental gaps in access to high quality care and multiple aspects of well-being;  
4 and

5 WHEREAS, The inaugural Black Midwives Day (BMD) campaign, founded and led by  
6 the National Black Midwives Alliance in 2023, is a day of awareness, activism, education and  
7 community building; and

8 WHEREAS, This day is intended to increase attention for the state of Black maternal  
9 health in the United States, the root causes of poor maternal health outcomes, and for community-  
10 driven policy, program, and care solutions; and

11 WHEREAS, In addition, BMD venerates the work and contributions of past and present  
12 midwives who have served to usher in new life despite a history fraught with persecution,  
13 enslavement, violence, racism and the systematic erasure of community Black midwives  
14 throughout the 20th century; and

15 WHEREAS, The decimation of midwifery across the Southern United States reduced the  
16 numbers of Black midwives from thousands to dozens in a 50 year period from the 1920s to the  
17 1970s, leaving many communities without care providers; and

18 WHEREAS, The resurgence of Black midwifery is a testament to the resilience,

1 resistance, and determination of spirit in the preservation of healing modalities that are practiced  
2 all over the world. The focus on holistic care, which involves caring for the whole person, family  
3 and community, is what makes a difference in midwifery; and

4 WHEREAS, Midwifery honors a birthing person’s right to bodily autonomy; can be  
5 facilitated at home, in a birth center, or hospital; and works in tandem with doulas, community  
6 health workers, obstetricians, pediatricians, and other health care providers; and

7 WHEREAS, Black families benefit from access to Black midwives to receive culturally  
8 sensitive and congruent care established through trust and respect; backed with the wisdom of  
9 time honored technique and best practices; and

10 WHEREAS, Black birthing people in the United States suffer from life threatening  
11 pregnancy complications, known as “maternal morbidities”, twice as often as white birthing  
12 people; and

13 WHEREAS, Maternal mortality rates in the United States are among the highest in the  
14 developed world, and increasing rapidly; and

15 WHEREAS, These deaths have devastating effects on Black children and families, and  
16 the vast majority is entirely preventable through assertive efforts to ensure Black birthing people  
17 have access to information, services, and supports to make their own health care decisions  
18 particularly around pregnancy and childbearing; and

19 WHEREAS, The high rates of maternal mortality among Black birthing people span  
20 across income levels, education levels, and socioeconomic status; and

21 WHEREAS, Structural racism, gender oppression, and the social determinants of health  
22 inequities experienced by Black birthing people in the United States significantly contribute to  
23 the disproportionately high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity among Black birthing  
24 people; and

25 WHEREAS, A fair distribution of resources, especially with regard to reproductive  
26 health care services, is critical to closing the racial disparity gap; and

27 WHEREAS, Justice-informed, culturally congruent models such as midwifery care are  
28 beneficial to Black birthing people; and

29 WHEREAS, An investment must be made in robust, quality and comprehensive health  
30 care for Black birthing people, and policies that support and promote affordable, holistic maternal  
31 health care that is free from gender and racial discrimination: and

32 WHEREAS, The National Black Midwives Alliance is campaigning for a Black  
33 Midwives Day: To strengthen the base of Black midwives and their supporters;

34 To preserve the cultural history of Black midwifery as an important part of the story of

1 America;

2 To provide advocacy tools that eliminate barriers to education and resources for Black  
3 midwives;

4 To build power by developing a national unified voice that advocates for Black  
5 midwifery;

6 To address perinatal health disparities that impact Black communities; and

7 To elevate the consumer demand for access to midwifery and community birth; and

8 WHEREAS, It is fitting and proper on Black Midwives Day to recognize the tremendous  
9 impact of human rights, reproductive justice, and birth justice frameworks; and

10 WHEREAS, Black Midwives Day is an opportunity to fight to end maternal mortality  
11 locally and globally; now, therefore be it

12 RESOLVED, That this Senate of the State of Rhode Island hereby believes that in order  
13 to better mitigate the effects of systemic and structural racism, this body must work to ensure that  
14 all Black people have access to midwives, doulas and other community-based, culturally-matched  
15 perinatal health providers; and be it further

16 RESOLVED, That this Senate hereby proclaims March 14, 2023, to be “Black Midwives  
17 Day” in the State of Rhode Island; and be it further

18 RESOLVED, That the Secretary of State be and hereby is authorized and directed to  
19 transmit a duly certified copy of this resolution to Ms. Jamarah Amani, Director, National Black  
20 Midwives Alliance.

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