



# **The Women Expansion of Learning and Labor Safety (WELLS) Act**

Senator Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE) and Congresswoman Robin Kelly (D-IL)

## **Background**

The United States is facing a Black maternal health crisis. Despite spending more of our GDP on healthcare than any other high-income country, the United States still has the highest rate of maternal deaths.<sup>1</sup> There are significant racial disparities with U.S. maternal health outcomes, including mortality rates of Black women being three times that of white women, and Black women having higher rates of preterm births, low birthweight births, and births with no or late prenatal care compared to their white counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

Last fall, there were several disturbing videos viewed across the country which showed Black laboring women being ignored when in pain and experiencing worse health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The woman who this legislation is named after, Mercedes Wells, was discharged from a hospital while in labor, with the nurse stating she had not progressed far enough in labor to be admitted. She delivered her baby in the car minutes after leaving the hospital, assisted by her husband.<sup>3</sup> This story, and many others like it, should never have happened, and we must act now to address the Black maternal health crisis.

## **Bill Summary**

The *Women Expansion of Learning and Labor Safety (WELLS) Act* seeks to address safe discharge of laboring women and racial bias in the health care system. Specifically, the bill will:

- Require hospitals to develop, implement, and document a Safe Labor Discharge Plan prior to discharging patients who present with signs and symptoms of labor.
- Require regular racial bias training and reporting of training for all recipients of funding from the Rural Maternity and Obstetrics Management Strategies (RMOMS) Program under HHS.

For questions or to cosponsor, please contact Grace Scott ([grace\\_scott@bluntrochester.senate.gov](mailto:grace_scott@bluntrochester.senate.gov)) and Amber Ray ([amber\\_ray@bluntrochester.senate.gov](mailto:amber_ray@bluntrochester.senate.gov)) in Sen. Blunt Rochester's office.

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<sup>1</sup> Hill L, Rao A, Artiga S, Ranji U. Racial Disparities in Maternal and Infant Health: Current Status and Efforts to Address Them. KFF. October 25, 2024. Accessed November 25, 2025. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/racial-disparities-in-maternal-and-infant-health-current-status-and-efforts-to-address-them/>

<sup>2</sup> Hoffman KM, Trawalter S, Axt JR, Oliver MN. Racial bias in pain assessment and treatment recommendations, and false beliefs about biological differences between blacks and whites. Proc Natl Acad Sci USA. 2016;113(16):4296-4301. doi:10.1073/pnas.1516047113

<sup>3</sup> Wilkins M. Dolton woman turned away by Crown Point hospital while in labor speaks out. Chicago Tribune. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2025/11/18/dolton-woman-turned-away-by-crown-point-hospital-speaks-out/>. November 18, 2025. Accessed November 25, 2025.