

October 03, 2023

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

Proclaiming October as Pregnancy & Infant Loss Awareness Month and the Day of Remembrance in Los Angeles County, October 15, 2023

One in four women will suffer a loss during pregnancy, at birth or in infancy. Pregnancy and infant loss - which includes miscarriage, stillbirth, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), ectopic pregnancy, termination for medical reasons, and the death of a newborn - have historically not been given the proper acknowledgement and value they truly deserve. According to the Los Angeles County (County) Department of Public Health (DPH), infant mortality has declined from 5.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1997 to 3.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2021. However, specific numbers on loss during pregnancy are frequently underreported or not reported at all. In the County, Black women/birthing people die due to pregnancy-related complications at four times the rate of White women, and Black infants die before their first birthday at two to four times the rate of infants of other races. High mortality rates among Black women/birthing people and Black infants persist across income and education levels - as well as geographical locations. The intersections of historical and structural racism, gender oppression, and inequities in the social determinants of health contribute to disproportionate stress and trauma on Black women/birthing people and subsequent unequal health outcomes.

Pregnancy and infant loss often lack a space for open dialogue and women/birthing people may experience shame or inability to publicly grieve since remembrance is reserved for private moments. In 1988, October was declared as a month to recognize the unique grief of bereaved parents and to demonstrate support to the many families who have suffered such a tragic loss. Promoting awareness of pregnancy and infant loss not only increases the likelihood that grieving families will receive understanding and support, but also results in improved education and prevention efforts which may ultimately reduce the incidence of these tragedies. October is also nationally recognized as Sudden Infant Death and Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Syndrome

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(SIDS/SUIDS) Awareness Month.

The County's Department of Health Services (DHS) and DPH provide comprehensive women's health services and education through trained doctors, nurses, and other healthcare staff at their County facilities. DHS offers prenatal care and services through their MAMA's Neighborhood program to DHS service participants through pregnancy and up to 1-year postpartum. The County's Department of Mental Health (DMH) has partnered with DHS' MAMA's Neighborhood program by developing Maternal/Perinatal Mental Health Champions in each service area to provide psychoeducation and mental health services as needed. DHS should work to ensure this program also offers education to service providers and resources to mothers and families experiencing pregnancy and infant loss. DPH has a division of programming focused on maternal, child and adolescent health whose mission is to maximize the health and quality of life for all women, infants, and their families in the County such as the African American Infant and Maternal Mortality (AAIMM) Prevention Initiative, AAIMM Doula Program, Black Infant Health Program, Nurse Family Partnership, Family Stabilization, Healthy Families America, Home Visitation Programs, and the SIDS/SUIDS Program. In addition to services that assist families in having healthful births and fostering the health of thriving children, they are unfortunately also called upon to provide support to families experiencing loss, including navigation to grief assistance resources and other related needs. DPH is currently developing a Compassion Response Plan to provide more coordinated assistance for families that experience a maternal or infant loss that will be publicized on their website and shared via social media. DPH will continue to increase programs that incorporate grief resources and awareness information for County residents and service providers to better serve residents.

The County's Department of Human Resources (DHR) per existing Federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) policy, does not provide paid parental leave benefits for those who experience a pregnancy loss or miscarriage. While FMLA does offer unpaid protected leave, known as job protection, this does not provide income replacement support since the County does not contribute to the State Disability Income program. DHR needs to offer comprehensive awareness

and educational resources to County staff through the County wellness programs, webinars, and newsletters to ensure that parental leave benefits can be utilized for those who experience pregnancy loss. By providing these resources, DHR in collaboration with DPH, DHS, and DMH would enable families, extended family members and colleagues, their service providers, and local communities to share resources and build awareness while also working to reduce the stigma and alienation experienced by many families.

Remembrance events take place in October - such as Pregnancy & Infant Loss Awareness Day - which happens globally on October 15th at 7:00 p.m. local time, where a candle is lit and remains for one-hour in recognition of pregnancy and infant loss. Annual remembrance gatherings hosted by organizations like Forever Footprints uplift the community connection, education, and support for these grieving families. Examples of support could include creating memory boxes and backpacks to provide to families - especially those families with young siblings - to create memories and understanding for themselves and the communities they live and work in. Numerous organizations that provide support, education, and remembrance for grieving families could be mobilized to provide employers and medical professionals with the education and resources to adequately care for the emotional needs of their staff and families who have experienced miscarriage, stillbirth, SIDS/SUIDS, pregnancy loss, or infant death.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Proclaim October 2023 as "Pregnancy & Infant Loss Awareness Month," coinciding with Sudden Infant Death and Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Syndrome Awareness Month throughout the County of Los Angeles (County) and recognize the families, professionals, and volunteers who work to reduce the stigma and alienation experienced by many families, while promoting awareness, understanding and support for these families.
2. Proclaim Sunday, October 15, 2023, as "Pregnancy & Infant Loss Awareness Day of Remembrance" throughout the County; and encourage County residents to participate at 7:00 p.m. local time in the International Wave of Light - the global remembrance - to

recognize all babies gone too soon.

3. Direct the Directors of the County Departments of Public Health (DPH), Health Services (DHS), Mental Health (DMH), and Human Resources (DHR) to work to:
 - a. Implement efforts to activate community stakeholders and community-based organizations, with a proven record of providing direct service, to provide education, and create community healing and understanding for families of pregnancy and infant loss; and
 - b. Provide residents with information about available resources, services support, other activities, events, and education through links on DPH, DHS, DMH and DHR County websites.

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(SWM/JJ/LS)