

COMMISSION ON RACE & ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

Minutes

October 22, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The fifth meeting of the Commission on Race and Access to Opportunity was held on October 22, 2024, at 1:00 PM in Room 129 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Killian Timoney, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Killian Timoney, Co-Chair; Senator Amanda Mays Bledsoe, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg and Gerald A. Neal; Representatives George Brown Jr., Samara Heavrin, and Nima Kulkarni; and Lyndon Pryor.

Guests: Dr. Edward Miller, Division Director of Maternal Fetal Medicine, Maternal Fetal Medicine Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology & Women's Health, University of Louisville School of Medicine.

LRC Staff: Brandon White and Logan Schaaf.

Maternal Health

Dr. Edward Miller, Division Director of Maternal Fetal Medicine, Maternal Fetal Medicine Assistant Professor, Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology & Women's Health, University of Louisville School of Medicine, discussed the state of maternal health in Kentucky. He reviewed the data on maternal health, the factors affecting population health, and policies that could improve maternal health.

Dr. Miller said the attainment of health equity is a key goal for any health system, and is achieved when everyone can reach their full health potential, and no one is disadvantaged from this potential due to socially determined circumstances, constructs, or positions. Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC) data shows that 88 percent of maternal mortality cases were deemed preventable, 20 percent of maternal deaths were pregnancy-related, over 50 percent of maternal deaths occur within 43 days to a year from the end of pregnancy, 60 percent of mothers without documented prenatal care had Medicaid funded healthcare, and 58 percent of all deaths had substance use as a contributing factor. The preterm birth rate is higher in Kentucky than the national average, and the rate of maternal deaths among Black women is significantly higher than it is among white women. There are many social determinants of health, including: economic stability, education access and quality, health care access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and

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community context. Approximately 80 percent of a person's health outcomes are influenced by these factors, rather than the medical care that they receive. Within the state, large geographic disparities exist in poverty, cancer rates, obesity, substance abuse, and overdoses. These social determinants of health and the disparities within the state are present in health generally, but are particularly evident in maternal health.

Dr. Miller praised Senate Bill 74 from the 2024 Regular Session as a crucial starting point towards increasing access to health care and improving maternal health. Critical next steps include: recruitment of medical students into primary care, retention of current primary care providers, expansion of access to care through telehealth, creation of comprehensive primary care through integration, expansion of access to postpartum coverage and services, and expansion of postpartum benefits.

Dr. Miller highlighted the importance of expanding doula services. A doula is a trained professional who provides continuous physical, emotional, and informational support to their client before, during, and shortly after childbirth to help them achieve the healthiest, most satisfying experience possible. Doula services significantly reduce adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Dr. Miller said that future areas of legislative expansion include care delivery transformation, data and oversight, and coverage and benefits.

Responding to questions from Senator Berg, Dr. Miller discussed both the health benefits and cost saving potential of doula services.

Responding to questions from Mr. Pryor, Dr. Miller discussed housing as a key social determinant of health. Lack of safe housing is a major contributor to stress, which contributes to high blood pressure and a list of other conditions that negatively impact maternal health. Dr. Miller also discussed the contributing factors to maternal suicide and potential solutions.

Responding to a question from Senator Berg, Dr. Miller reviewed some of the uses of maternal health data collection.

Responding to questions from Representative Kulkarni, Dr. Miller discussed system level solutions to increasing the number of primary care doctors.

Responding to a question from Senator Berg, Dr. Miller highlighted potential improvements to the physician pipeline and ways to keep physicians in the state.

Responding to a question from Representative Kulkarni, Dr. Miller said the foreign

physician program could help stabilize services in regions with shortages.

Chair Timoney discussed the challenges of maintaining strong patient-doctor relationships in the wake of many people's loss of trust in medical institutions. Dr. Miller highlighted vaccine hesitancy issues in minority communities and efforts to address them.

Responding to a question from Mr. Pryor, Dr. Miller noted the potential for improvements in maternal health that could spring from robust data collection on the social determinants of health.

Representative Brown praised Dr. Miller's presentation and said that he looks forward to legislative steps to address the issues raised.

Responding to questions from Chair Timoney, Dr. Miller discussed the impacts of bias on maternal health. Bias reinforces and perpetuates many of the problems that exacerbate maternal health disparities. Dr. Miller also highlighted the pros and cons of expanding birthing centers. Senator Berg said she has reservations regarding the expansion of birthing centers. Dr. Miller discussed potential protections and responses to problems that can arise with birthing centers.

Adjournment

With no further business before the commission, the meeting adjourned at 2:40 PM.