

Chairperson Hilderbrand and members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee:

My name is Stacey Knoell, and I am the Executive Director of the Kansas African American Affairs Commission but this morning I am here in my role as a Black mother.

Both of my pregnancies were considered, “high risk”. I was over 35 and had undergone surgeries on my uterus to remove fibroids that had prevented me from becoming pregnant earlier. I remember my obstetrician telling me explicitly I was not to go into labor. She scheduled me for a cesarian section at week 39 to make sure she got to me before the baby decided to make an appearance. My first child arrived one snowy day in 2016, happy and healthy.

Now one fibroid surgery and one c-section in, my second pregnancy was even higher risk for hemorrhage and the doctors watched me closely. Another delivery was scheduled in week 39 and my second child arrived screaming like her sister.

I recall as clear as day the voice of an attending nurse as I laid on the table, the scene hidden from my sight by that blue curtain. “She’s bleeding.”

By then I had heard the statistics about maternal mortality. I knew that childbirth was a leading cause of death for women outside the United States and that in the US it remained a top 10 cause of death among Black women. “Pregnancy complications” the CDC calls it.

With two words I feared I would become just another statistic in the line of Black women who die in childbirth. It is clear that I survived. I had chosen my OB because she is a woman of color. The delivery team worked on me to stop my bleeding and she checked in on me several times in the following days to ensure my recovery. I know that wasn’t a given because she had not done that with my first birth experience with her.

I survived my “pregnancy complications” but a horrifying number of Black women don’t. The statistics reflecting maternal mortality in Kansas are sobering and demand attention. That is why I am here to support Senate Bill 42 that would allow the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to look into any and all cases of maternal death specifically with an eye on the race of the mother and any social determinants of health that may come into play.

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Signature: Stacey B. Knoell

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