

BRINGING POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION TO LIGHT



LISA'S STORY

Lisa had a healthy pregnancy and a strong support system. But she was plagued by disturbing thoughts. Although she was at low risk, she was constantly scared of going into premature labor or that her baby would be stillborn.

When her son arrived, rather than feeling joyful, her painful emotions grew. She obsessed over details of his care, but didn't feel connected to him. She had the feeling that she was just a stand in, that her baby's real mom would walk through the door at any moment. She stopped sleeping—at all.

Although she had suffered from depression in the past, increasing her risk for postpartum depression ("PPD"), she didn't identify this as what she was experiencing—and neither did her family, friends, doctors, or anyone else around her. "It's just the baby blues," many said.

Sleepless nights became sleepless weeks. After three weeks without sleeping a wink, and with those around her still unaware of how desperate she was, she checked herself into the ER. From there she was transferred to a psychiatric hospital. She got some help there, but her disorder was still not correctly diagnosed.

Among the resources at the hospital she found the Postpartum Support International Warmline, which linked her with a local therapist. Finally, with therapy and medication, she began to heal. Now, three years later, she is the happy mother of a thriving preschooler.

Since her successful treatment, Lisa has become a volunteer for Postpartum Support International and the North Shore Postpartum Depression Task Force, and a strong supporter of HB 3897, using her experience to help other moms get the support and treatment they need—much sooner than she did.

An Act Relative to Postpartum Depression (House Bill 3897)

Lead Sponsor: Representative Ellen Story

PROPOSAL:

This bill would require that OB/GYNs, midwives, pediatricians and other primary care providers **screen mothers regularly for depression during pregnancy and in the first year of their baby's lives, to be covered by insurance.** It calls for the compilation of referral lists of clinicians and support groups around the state, and **professional and public education on postpartum depression.**

BACKGROUND:

Approximately **15% of mothers in Massachusetts** suffer from postpartum depression ("PPD"), a painful condition marked by **despair, guilt, anxiety, and fears of hurting oneself or one's baby.** While some doctors are sensitive to the signs of PPD, understanding, identification and treatment of this mental illness is not widespread, and many mothers are suffering unnecessarily. If untreated, PPD can have **devastating consequences** on babies and children—including developmental, emotional, and behavioral problems—and, of course, on whole families.

Fortunately, **PPD is treatable,** and a simple screen, followed by a referral, can get women the help they need. Several other states now require the distribution of information on PPD, and one (New Jersey) has implemented universal screening shortly after birth. However, the passage of this bill would **make Massachusetts the national leader** in instituting comprehensive, repeated screening, coupled with a referral system and the necessary public and professional education to make it work. Universal screening and public education will also **tackle one of the primary barriers to families receiving treatment for this mental illness—stigma**—and help them feel comfortable coming forward to get the help they need.

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION BILL ENDORSERS

Baystate Health

Dr. William R. Beardslee, MD, Director, Baer Prevention Initiatives, Children's Hospital Boston,
Gardner-Monks Professor of Child Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

Boston Association for Childbirth Education

Boston Institute for Psychotherapy/Rice Center

Boston Public Health Commission

The Brazelton Institute

Cape & Islands Maternal Depression Task Force

Children's Hospital Boston

The Children's Trust Fund

Connected Beginnings Training Institute

Health Care for All

Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Massachusetts

Isis Maternity

Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Boston

March of Dimes

Massachusetts Association of Infant Mental Health

Massachusetts Coalition of Nurse Practitioners

Massachusetts Midwives' Alliance

Massachusetts School of Professional Psychology

Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

MotherCare Services, Inc.

MotherWoman

National Alliance on Mental Illness of Western Massachusetts

National Association of Social Workers, Massachusetts Chapter

North Shore Postpartum Depression Task Force

Nurses United for Responsible Services

Postpartum Support International

Pregnancy and Postpartum Coalition of Western Massachusetts

Dr. Ed Tronick, University Distinguished Professor, University of Massachusetts Boston, Children's Hospital
Boston, Harvard Medical School

University of Massachusetts Boston Infant-Parent Mental Health Post-Graduate Certificate Program

Warmlines

Dr. Barry Zuckerman, Joel and Barbara Alpert Professor and Chair, Department of Pediatrics, Boston Medical
Center/ Boston University School of Medicine