**Ellen Story Commission on Postpartum Depression Quarterly Meeting – April 3, 2024**

Commissioners Present: Sen. Liz Miranda (Co-chair), Rep. Brandy Fluker Oakley (Co-chair), Sen. Becca Rausch, Stephanie Crawford, Jessie Colbert, Nneka Hall, Chloe Zera, Rebecca Butler (DOI), Beth Buxton (DPH), Margarita O’Neill-Arana (DMH), Sarah Krinsky (MassHealth), Kerry LaBounty, Josh Sparrow, Jen Gilbert, Liz Murphy, Jayne Singer, Karen Garber, Bonni Berkowitz on behalf of Sen. Bruce Tarr, Joselyne Reynoso on behalf of Sen. Joan Lovely

(??) Lauren Almeida (DCF), Rep. Mindy Domb

Commissioners Not Present: Rep. Carole Fiola, Rep. Kim Ferguson, Rep. Jim O’Day, Sen. John Keenan, Leena Mittal, Tyreese Nicolas (EEC), Divya Kumar, Lisa Scarfo, Lee Cohen, Lee Cohen, Tiffany Moore Simas, Nadja Lopez

I. Welcome and Introduction

Co-Chair Miranda’s District Director Rashelle Centeio welcomed commissioners and guests. Ms. Centeio issued a reminder that former coordinator Ashley Healey had stepped down from her role and that herself and Co-Chair Fluker Oakley’s staffer Stefanie Caros would be supporting the Commission in the meantime. Ms. Centeio announced that the meeting was being conducted pursuant to Open Meeting Law and that the meeting was being recorded and live-streamed through the legislature’s website.

The Commission proceeded to roll call. Ms. Centeio mentioned a delay in getting the minutes from the last quarterly meeting on 1/9/24 but said that those would be sent over to commissioners as soon as possible.

Co-Chair Fluker Oakley gave a reminder about the film screening and panel discussion happening on April 8 at the State House for Black Maternal Health Week, moderated by former state representative Charlotte Golar Richie. Co-Chair Fluker Oakley also announced a second screening at the Strand Theater in Dorchester on April 17, 2024. Co-Chair Fluker Oakley spoke about the film’s ability to demonstrate the obstacles that Black women face in accessing the reproductive and maternal healthcare systems.

Co-Chair Miranda announced the 7th annual conference of the Center for Black Maternal Health at Tufts University would be happening all day on April 5, 2024 and would be completely virtual. The theme of the conference this year is technology as it relates to birthing justice in the Commonwealth and nationally.

Co-Chair Miranda also announced the Massachusetts Department of Public Health’s new grant program to increase access to reproductive, perinatal, and family planning services while reducing disparities in maternal health outcomes. The grant program will award $10 million over 3 years to organizations that provide prenatal care, postpartum depression care, post-miscarriage mental health care, midwifery services, and reproductive health care. Co-Chair Miranda mentioned it was rare to see all of the reproductive justice continuums represented together in legislative and funding streams; the Co-Chair also offered support as elected officials with letters of support or other avenues. The grant had been posted online as of the meeting.

Co-Chair Miranda also announced that Black Maternal Health Week across the country is from April 11 to April 17 and underscored the importance of this week, given that morbidity and mortality rates had doubled for African American birthing individuals across the state. Co-Chair Miranda expressed her belief that working on the health of the communities of those who are most afflicted and underserved helps all communities and shared that this sentiment was generally agreed upon in the bicameral, bipartisan Women’s Caucus that both co-chairs are a part of.

Ms. Centeio asked for questions, and there were none.

II. Discussion of first installment of State of Black Maternal Health roundtable series on 1/24/24

Ms. Centeio highlighted the remarkable panelists and discussion (with Commission Co-Chairs as moderators) at the January roundtable event and opened the floor to comment.

Co-Chair Miranda pointed to the high attendance of the panel, with hundreds of individuals who had registered and over a hundred individuals in attendance on the webinar. Co-Chair Miranda also praised the gathering of federal delegates (namely Sen. Elizabeth Warrren), state leaders, community leaders, practitioners, municipal leaders, and people with lived experiences in one event.

Commissioner Stephanie Crawford noted the genuine and personal nature of questions and comments from panel attendees, which enabled asking for advice, connecting with others, and building community.

Commissioner Jessie Colbert commented in the chat on the panel being big-picture and dynamic.

Ms. Centeio asked for feedback and critique on improvements for future events in the series. Upon questioning, Ms. Centeio also shared that the panel had been recorded and noted that she would look for the link and send it out.

III. Planning for second installment of State of Black Maternal Health roundtable series/Perinatal Mental Health Awareness Day on 5/3/24

Ms. Centeio introduced this double event that would be taking place on May 3, 2024 in the Great Hall of Flags at the State House, with the second roundtable installment in unison with the 8th Perinatal Mental Health Awareness Day hosted by the Ellen Story Commission. Ms. Centeio mentioned they were looking for vendors and speakers and invited the co-chairs to comment.

Co-Chair Miranda noted that several details needed to be firmed up for the event’s partners, the MA Department of Public Health and HHS at the federal level. Co-Chair Miranda asked for 2-3 commissioners to help with virtual planning meetings for the event, including a panel of speakers and resource tables to help make the event feel full and vibrant. Co-Chair Miranda asked if any commissioners would be interested in serving as panelists. Lastly, Co-Chair Miranda asked for help with promotion.

Co-Chair Fluker Oakley added thanks for the individuals who supported the planning of the event last year and nodded to the benefits of collective knowledge and input across the board from the commission. The Co-Chair also mentioned the benefits for turnout of sharing the January roundtable outside of their typical networks through a “hub and spokes” approach—including on newsletters and social media, through hospital and medical residents/faculty networks. The Co-Chair encouraged similar kinds of outreach for this event in May.

Commissioner Leena Mittal mentioned being available to table, and also asked if there was a flyer or summary materials to share with their networks or a particular theme.

Ms. Centeio mentioned that there was a flyer in the final rounds of being approved, and that the theme for this year would be connections—namely connecting stakeholders across the state to collaborate.

Commissioner Jennifer Gilbert offered availability to help.

Commissioner Beth Buxton offered the MA Department of Public Health’s communications office services to help review and finalize the flyer.

Co-Chair Liz Miranda prompted Ms. Centeio to provide an overview of how the event proceeded last year. Ms. Centeio responded by describing that theme last year was International Bereaved Mother’s Awareness Day and that the event went from 11:30am until 1:45pm, with time beforehand allotted for individuals to collect resources from the 20 vendors in attendance. The event started with opening remarks from co-chairs and presentations by Samantha LaCroix, Jessica Paulino, Dr. Cameron Abdul, Clementina Cherry, and Kenneth Pritchard Jr., ending on a “say their names” activity. Ms. Centeio then asked for feedback on the length of this program this year (i.e. whether to shorten it) and suggestions about speakers.

Co-Chair Liz Miranda mentioned a recent event that was structured around a series of fireside chats for 30 minutes each (3-4 questions with 3-4 panelists); this helped keep individuals engaged through shorter conversation spans. The Co-Chair also mentioned wanting to bring more people in from the community, outside of staffers in the building, to attend the event.

Commissioner Nneka Hall noted that this planning process needs to be a group/community effort, mentioning that last year it had been hard to do it largely as one person.

Co-Chair Fluker Oakley acknowledged the support in the chat and expressed gratitude for Commissioner Nneka Hall’s comment. The Co-Chair asked Ms. Centeio to set up a meeting with Commissioners Jennifer Gilbert, Leena Mittal, and Nneka Hall to brainstorm and strategize in the next few weeks, given that the schedules of practitioners in the area fill up quickly. The Co-Chair called for feedback on the fireside chat event and on the overall flow of the event.

Commissioner Jennifer Gilbert mentioned attending an event at Duke in January at the National Curriculum for Reproductive Psychiatry that had an engaging opening speaker and offered to try and reach out if it was of interest.

Co-Chair Miranda said that 11-11:30am would be a good opportunity to allow for mingling and pointed out the possible need for a grounding activity to start the event given the heavy topic. Co-Chair Miranda mentioned wanting support from Commissioners even if not as a panelist at the event given the expertise in the Commission. Co-Chair Miranda also mentioned the importance of lived experience in understanding stories beyond media narratives. Co-Chair Miranda circled back to the sensitive nature of the topics and raised the possibility of creating a space in the room for attendees to take a moment if needed.

Commissioner Jayne Singer recalled having a series of speakers for 5 minutes each during one year of the event which provided an avenue to hear from different perspectives through short and powerful targeted messages.

Commissioner Margarita O’Neill-Arana asked for more details about the expected audience.

Ms. Centeio shared that past events were attended by individuals working in the sector and stated that the rationale for the event is to allow attendees to connect with legislators working at the State House in support of creating legislation.

Commissioner Margarita O’Neill-Arana followed up to comment that individuals in the sector may not need basic context, but legislators in attendance might. Commissioner O’Neill-Arana raised an open question about if there might be a way to make the event more interactive to facilitate connection.

Commissioner Nneka Hall mentioned that speaking at the event in 2019 led to joining the Commission and mentioned wanting to reach all kinds of people through the event.

Commissioner Jennifer Gilbert mentioned an observed general trend of disintegration in communities and wondered if it would make sense to draw connections to “alternative community leaders” in other spaces to facilitate the theme of broader connection.

IV. Announcements

Commissioner Beth Buxton praised the Commission’s advocacy for universal postpartum depression screening programs in community health centers in the fiscal budget from last year. This enabled the expansion of screening from five sites to eight sites and attempts to innovate including through electronic medical record information, staff training, international training programs, and concrete support with supplies. Commissioner Buxton extended the Co-Chairs, as well as others from the Commission, an invitation to a virtual event on June 11, 2024 with the vendors and offered to share the event agenda for those interested. Co-Chair Fluker Oakley asked for the information to be shared with staffers.

Commissioner Sarah Krimsky noted that as of last year, MassHealth (which covers 40% of births in MA) now covers doula services during pregnancy, birth, and up to 12 months after birth for all pregnancy outcomes, with a growing network of between 60-70 doula providers. Commissioner Krimsky mentioned an upcoming push to get this information out and asked to share this information with the Commission to distribute through their networks.

Commissioner Nneka Hall mentioned producing two pregnancy-loss-geared “This is My Brave” shows in October 2024 and May 2025.

V. Public Comment

Ms. Centieo opened the floor to public comment. Seeing and hearing none, Ms. Centeio asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made and seconded.

VI. Adjournment