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Crain’s New York: Gillibrand proposes $200 million in funding to lower maternal mortality
Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand said Tuesday she is introducing a bill that will address the rising number of women dying from childbirth-related complications, creating a five-year, $200 million grant program for hospitals. The Modernizing Obstetric Medicine Standards Act would direct the Department of Health and Human Services to create new and updated best practices and assist hospitals in implementing them. It would provide hospitals with the $200 million to support training and the needed supplies to prevent maternal deaths and complications. Facilities serving low-income, at-risk and rural populations will receive priority. New York ranked 30th in maternal mortality, with 20.6 deaths per 100,000 births, according to the most recent data from the United Health Foundation. The rate was 22.9 per 100,000 in New York City, according to the state Health Department.
"Too many of our hospitals are just not equipped to deal with these emergencies when they happen," Gillibrand said during a call with reporters. The bill also will direct the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to improve its surveillance of deaths by incorporating state investigations and providing assistance to state maternal mortality review committees as needed.

Other officials have also sought to address maternal mortality. Gov. Andrew Cuomo introduced programs in April, including a task force to tackle racial disparities, a summit on best practices and a pilot to expand Medicaid coverage for doulas.

Last year the city created its own committee for reviewing deaths and severe complications from childbirth. City health department data from 2006 to 2010 showed black women were 12 times more likely than white women to die of complications from pregnancy. Gillibrand's bill would introduce national standards for treating common pregnancy complications such as hypertension and hemorrhage, said Dr. Iffath Hoskins, chair of the local district of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

"I like the fact that some part of the $200 million will go toward low-income patients," said Hoskins, who is a clinical professor at NYU Langone Health. "Racial disparities make a big difference. African-American women tend to have a higher rate of chronic hypertension."

Gillibrand's proposal is one of several bills focused on maternal mortality introduced in the Senate by Democrats. Sen. Kamala Harris of California sponsored the Maternal Care Act, which authorizes two grant programs targeting racial disparities in maternal care; Sen. Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota introduced the Maternal Health Accountability Act of 2017 to provide funding to states and Native American reservations to review maternal deaths; and Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan is pushing for the Quality Care for Moms and Babies Act to better measure the quality of maternal and infant care paid for through Medicaid and CHIP. In a Republican-controlled Senate, those bills will face an uphill battle and require some Republican support. Gillibrand is confident she will get it. "As more and more members become aware of the crisis and the facts, I think we will get bipartisan support for all of [the bills]," she said. —J.L.

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**Mention of SMI (directly or through an ACOG link in the article)**