

September 24, 2018

Statement
OF Timoria McQueen Saba

Survivor of a near fatal postpartum hemorrhage, Commissioner for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Senator Ellen Story Special Commission on Postpartum Depression

BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND
COMMERCE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

“BETTER DATA AND BETTER OUTCOMES: REDUCING MATERNAL MORTALITY IN
THE U.S.”

Dear Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Green, members of the committee: My name is Timoria McQueen Saba.

I am an African-American mother of two daughters, Graison Joyce and Harper Elle. I've waited many years to see a bill like this get passed. On April 19, 2010, I started hemorrhaging after giving birth to Graison. My uterus wouldn't contract after the birth, known as a uterine atony. Doctors told me that they would try to save my uterus and ovaries by performing a procedure called an embolization. If that was not successful, they would have to give me a hysterectomy. If the bleeding continued after receiving a hysterectomy, I was told that I would die.

My pregnancy with Graison can best be described as “normal”. I had no pre-existing conditions and am fortunate to have great health insurance. I had a relatively easy, but long (twenty-seven hour) labor. Once I was fully dilated, delivery was fast and easy — I remember thinking it was almost *too* easy. Ten pushes and twenty minutes

later, my beautiful daughter was born. As I held Graison in my arms for a few moments, I could feel a shift in the mood of the hospital staff in the room. Before I knew it, the serenity of the room was tainted by the sounds of warning beeps from the machines I was hooked up to. Next, the room became flooded with strangers.

Enter emergency personnel. My husband, Robert, and Graison were rushed out of the room and taken into the nursery. I watched blood pour out of my vagina through the reflection from an overhead television screen. My body was weak, and I struggled to keep my eyes open, feeling deep down that if I allowed them to close they would never open again. After a three-hour long surgery (during which I was fully conscious), I was left in critical condition. Instead of staying in intensive care alone, my Ob/Gyn insisted that I be reunited with Graison and Robert in the labor and delivery ward.

I was told not to move a muscle, which included nursing or holding my new baby. I lay awake all night in pain. I was afraid to sleep, afraid to move, afraid that every breath I took might shake loose whatever was keeping me together. I stared at Graison all night. Her big, round, brown eyes peered through the bassinet. I made a promise to her that I would be live — she would *not* be a motherless child. I survived and the three of us went home five days later.

I was diagnosed with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) several weeks after giving birth. Because of what happened, I was afraid to leave the house. This was a very new feeling to me. At the time, I was a professional make-up artist and loved traveling with my clients to destinations near and far. I had never been afraid to go

anywhere! After the traumatic birth, I was easily startled and wrought with anxiety that something might happen to me, my daughter or my husband.

It became increasingly difficult to sleep at night. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw the blood pouring from my body and other reminders of the ordeal I had suffered through. Due to the demands of motherhood, I tried to push my negative feelings aside. I was excited to be a mom and savored the days I spent with Graison. I challenged myself to get out of the house. I joined a hospital support group for new moms and signed up for "Mommy and Me" baby music classes. As I met more new moms I felt a common bond among us as we talked about breastfeeding, sleep schedules and baby gear. We also shared intimate details of our lives that you would never think possible to share with strangers. I made great friends through joining that group. Despite my outgoing nature and positive outlook on life, deep inside I remained a traumatized victim of a near fatal postpartum hemorrhage. No other mom I met back then had experienced a postpartum hemorrhage. My feelings about the hemorrhage and the surgery never went away. My emotions cycled through anger, guilt, fear and sadness.

Thirteen months after Graison was born, I had a miscarriage which resulted in another hemorrhage. This occurred in front of several people while I was in a frozen yogurt shop. The miscarriage triggered the difficult emotions from the hemorrhage I suffered the year prior. I underwent an emergency D &C and returned home the next day. Yet again- I was sad, angry and afraid that I might bleed to death at any moment.

I knew that I could not be the *only* woman who experienced these types of harrowing birth and pregnancy complications. While looking for answers, I realized that resources and support for mothers and families who had survived a near miss or lost a loved one due to a birth or pregnancy complication, were scarce. I began sharing my story publicly in 2012 and have since connected with thousands of women across America who have experienced similar birth and pregnancy complications; and the lingering psychological effects. With the help of a therapist who specializes in postpartum mental health and birth trauma, I was able to heal. I gave birth to Harper Elle in March 2014. I'm happy to report that my birth experience the second time around was perfectly "normal."

I am now a full-time maternal health advocate, speaker and writer with a focus on mental and physical trauma due to childbirth and pregnancy. I am also the coordinator of resources and support for Postpartum Support International (PSI) in the Boston Metro West and Central areas. In this role, I connect women suffering from postpartum mood disorders and their families to local therapists and support groups. I'm also a member of the PSI President's Advisory Council. Twice per month, I facilitate a free peer-to-peer mother's support group, *Emotional Wellbeing After Baby*, at Milford Regional Hospital in Milford, MA. In 2017, I was honored to be appointed by MA State Rep. James O'Day (D-14 Worcester) to a House chair seat on the Senator Ellen Story Special Commission on Postpartum Depression.

Every day I think about how fortunate I am. I survived two hemorrhages due to birth and pregnancy complications. Statistics show that black mothers die during childbirth at three to four times the rate of white mothers.

Statistically speaking, I shouldn't be alive.

But because I survived, it is my duty and a privilege to be a voice for mothers who struggle to cope with the mental and physical effects of a near fatal birth trauma, and also honor those who tragically, have died.

Passing HR 1318: Preventing Maternal Mortality Act of 2017 is imperative to the health of all mothers and families in the United States. Individual states will be able to learn the exact causes of deaths due to childbirth and pregnancy complications, therefore helping healthcare providers to identify the proper preventions or the best emergency response plans.

It is our responsibility to care for *all* mothers in America. Legislators, healthcare providers, advocates and patients must work together to give mothers the healthcare they deserve. By passing this bill and working together to understand the disparities in outcomes, we will prevent mothers from dying and save entire generations from suffering.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my story with you.