

# POSTPARTUM SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL



## PSI Celebrates Melanie Blocker Stokes MOTHERS Act in Health Insurance Reform News Conferences held in New Jersey and Washington DC to celebrate this Mother's Day Gift

*Mother's Day Weekend 2010 was held by two wonderful bookends: two press conferences to celebrate the passage of the Melanie Blocker Stokes MOTHERS Act.*

On Thursday, May 6, in Washington DC, [Senator Robert Menendez](#) (D-NJ) and [Representative Bobby Rush](#) (D-IL) were joined by advocates, survivors, and representatives from the American Psychological Association and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. It was a beautiful day -- full of blue sky and Spring breezes -- on which to begin moving forward with the development of much-needed improved care for new mothers with postpartum mood disorders. We are so proud to be represented so eloquently by PSI members - Carol Blocker, Susan Stone, Sylvia Lasalandra, and Katherine Stone - and to have PSI members Alexis Menken and Susan Feingold mentioned in the remarks of Dr. Keita from the APA.

On Monday, May 10, Senator Menendez held another well-attended press conference in Ridgewood, New Jersey that became a community event with several families and children present. The Senator stood with advocates Brooke Shields, former first New Jersey first lady Mary Jo Codey, Susan Stone and Sylvia Lasalandra to celebrate passage of the new legislation to help postpartum women and families.

The MOTHERS Act was named after [Melanie Blocker Stokes](#), who lost her battle with postpartum psychosis in 2001, just weeks after her daughter was born, after falling to her death from the rooftop of a Chicago hotel. The MOTHERS Act will help to provide the kind of awareness and services that Melanie should have had and that today's mothers deserve. [As Senator Menendez and Brooke Shields wrote jointly on the Huffington Post last week](#), this legislation "... encourages the creation of local programs to give grants to community organizations, hospitals, and local governments to put in place effective support services. Hopefully, over time, we will see such support services spring up in every city and community across America because postpartum depression has no boundaries." It also calls for more research into the causes of and treatments for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, as well as a national awareness campaign.

[Susan Stone described Carol Blocker's dedication to this legislation and her daughter's memory best, writing about the press event on her blog Perinatal Pro:](#) "Carol embodies the eternal caretaking and dedication associated with a mother's love for her child - which crosses the boundaries of life and death, knows no limits and stops at nothing to achieve an end. In this case, Carol's end is one which will save the lives of thousands of women she will never meet. As the bill bears her daughter's name, the legacy of Melanie Blocker Stokes will be one of help and support to mothers struggling with pregnancy related mood disorders - that they might be spared and saved from a similar fate."

We are eternally grateful to Sen. Menendez and Rep. Rush for their long-term unwavering commitment which resulted in the passage of this bill, as well as to Richard and Mary Jo Cody, former New Jersey Governor and First Lady, for their leadership and courage, and all of the PSI members who have helped pushed for its passage over the years.

It's now up to the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) and Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to start

the process of developing and rolling out the public awareness campaign for postpartum depression. While funds already exist within HRSA for the national awareness campaign and research, they do not for the community grants. Thus we need to push to ensure the \$3 million budgeted in the bill for the grants is appropriated.

It's also important to point out that there was an additional amendment to the Healthcare Reform legislation that pertains to women with perinatal mood and anxiety disorders. Senator Barbara Mikulski's amendment would require that all health insurance plans cover the cost of women's preventive care and screenings. It was suggested by Mikulski's office that this could include screening for postpartum depression. HRSA and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force will end up creating the final guidelines as to exactly which screenings will be covered. There remains an opportunity to influence that process.

We're not done yet and must continue to work to ensure that everything that is promised in the bill becomes reality. Thursday was, nonetheless, a very important step. It provided official validation. We exist. Women with postpartum depression and anxiety exist, in great numbers actually. This nation's officials are recognizing that. Passage of the Melanie Blocker Stokes MOTHERS Act was a great step forward for all of those people who have labored so long to get to this point and for the mothers who have yet to experience perinatal mood or anxiety disorders.

[Watch the entire May 6 MOTHERS Act press conference on YouTube here.](#)

*Photo from DC News Conference at top of page: From left to right, Katherine Stone, PSI board member; Sylvia Lasalandra, PPD survivor and author of the book "A Daughter's Touch"; Senator Robert Menendez; Dr. Gwendolyn Keita of the [American Psychological Association](#); Dr. Albert Strunk of the [American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#); and Susan Stone, chair of [Postpartum Support International's](#) President's Advisory Council.*

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