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**AT THE CLOSE OF BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH WEEK, A
CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT THE DIGNITY, AUTONOMY, AND
BODILY INTEGRITY OF FAMILIES IS REBORN**

*New Yorkers directly impacted by the family policing system and their allies
unite to call for the passage of the Informed Consent Act*

New York, NY – Today, in honor of Black Maternal Health Week, a coalition of New Yorkers directly impacted by nonconsensual drug testing during pregnancy and their allies **announce a renewed campaign** to help advance racial and reproductive justice in New York. The campaign aims to disrupt the practice of “test-and-report” and move New York toward a system of care that centers on the actual medical needs of perinatal people* and newborns and is rooted in dignity, autonomy, and bodily integrity for all families.

“For years, New York has surveilled and criminalized people who use substances, ripping newborns from their families under the guise of fetal protection and the safety of children, even though medical science and public health guidance make clear that punishment and stigma undermine the health and well-being of perinatal people and newborns,” said **Jasmine Wali, MSW on behalf of the Informed Consent Coalition**. “Today, we declare: a better world is possible, one rooted in the dignity, autonomy, and bodily integrity of all families. And it starts with passing the Informed Consent Act.”

The campaign’s target is the widespread practice of “test-and-report,” wherein healthcare providers drug test or screen perinatal people and newborns without their consent and routinely report these test results to family policing agencies. Despite the lived expertise of families impacted by test and report, **numerous investigations** showing how the practice systematically targets Black, Latine, indigenous, and low-income New Yorkers, and **studies** making the harms of test-and-report clear, the practice persists.

Indeed, test-and-report [contributes to](#) the maternal-infant health crisis in New York. Rather than responding with care, encouraging uptake of prenatal care, and supporting the critical early bonding moments between the newborn and their birthing parents, test-and-report does just the opposite. The practice [deters](#) perinatal New Yorkers from seeking critical prenatal care for fear that interacting with a healthcare provider will result in their newborn or child being taken away from them. While the [latest medical science](#) confirms what doulas, reproductive justice advocates, and community leaders have said for years – that the best healthcare for a newborn is their parent, and that the real threat to children comes from societal neglect in the form of forced family separation and lack of access to robust supports and resources for newborns and their families.

The coalition is calling for the passage of the [Informed Consent Act](#), which would require healthcare providers to obtain written and verbal informed consent from perinatal people before drug testing and verbal drug screening them or their newborns. By understanding the medical reasons and risks of a drug test or screen beforehand, perinatal people can not only make the best medical decisions for themselves and their newborns, but also seek medical care without fear and build relationships with their doctors, both of which are critical to the long-lasting health and well-being of children and families.

The Informed Consent Act would move New York birth care away from the stigmatization, surveillance, and criminalization of people who use substances. Instead, it would provide care and non-stigmatizing support based on the [recognition](#) that substance use does not define how much a person loves their child nor their ability to care for their child. It would make clear that family integrity, not family separation, and maternal-infant health and well-being, not punishment, is the State's priority.

"The passage of the Informed Consent Act is a necessary step toward achieving true birth and reproductive justice in New York State," said **Desseray Wright, Parent Advocate in The Bronx Defenders' Family Defense Practice**. "As public defenders in the Bronx, we see firsthand how medical racism rips families apart and places mostly Black, Latine, and low-income children in the foster system, causing long-lasting and often irreparable damage to their health and the well-being of their families. We need the Informed Consent Act to move New York toward a system of care that is non-stigmatizing, non-punitive, and based in family integrity, not separation."

"As we face countless attacks to the bodily autonomy and rights of pregnant people and their families, this timely campaign is an important tool for New Yorkers who need information and support, and we couldn't be more proud to serve as an Informed Consent Coalition member," said **Pregnancy Justice Policy and Program Associate Lauren**

Wranosky. "Time and again in our work, we see the harm that arises from the nonconsensual drug testing of pregnant people and their newborns take the form of the erosion of the patient-provider relationship and subsequent criminal and family regulation system cases. This should never be. We are calling for the Assembly to swiftly pass the Informed Consent Act to begin building trust with and protecting New York families."

"The Informed Consent Act works to ensure that pregnant people can connect with evidence-based support and care. Our current policy has turned doctors from those who provide compassionate care into investigative arms of the family regulation system, which has devastating effects on families," said **Melissa Moore, Director of Civil Systems Reform at Drug Policy Alliance.** "This important campaign will foster dignity for pregnant people and families, support improved birth outcomes by working to repair and restore patient trust in their providers, and discourage practices that lead to separation of New York families, particularly families of color."

"Too often, Black and Latinx pregnant New Yorkers are subjected to medically unnecessary and discriminatory drug testing without their consent, which can have devastating consequences on their health and families," said **Jenna Lauter, policy counsel at the New York Civil Liberties Union.** "Passing the Informed Consent Act would be a crucial step towards ensuring that pregnant New Yorkers are treated with dignity and respect, not surveillance and the threat of punitive family separation."

Imani Worthy, Co-Founder of Black Families Love and Unite said, "The decision overlooks the fact that substance use does not define a person's ability to love and care for their children. What truly matters is preserving family integrity and ensuring access to supportive, non-stigmatizing healthcare, which is vital for the well-being of babies."

About The Informed Consent Coalition

Rooted in community and the expertise of families impacted by the family policing system, the Informed Consent Coalition is fighting for a world that honors the dignity, autonomy, and bodily integrity of all families by calling for the passage of the Informed Consent Act as an important step to realizing that vision. The Coalition is led by people directly impacted by the family policing system, organizers, activists, doulas, physicians, nurses, social workers, public defenders, civil rights groups, and reproductive rights and justice organizations.

**Note on language:* The Informed Consent Coalition uses the term “perinatal people” more often than “pregnant women,” as it reflects the full birthing process (from pregnancy to postpartum) and is gender neutral. We use the terms “family policing system” or “family regulation system” instead of the “child welfare system” because we recognize that the system neither protects nor facilitates the welfare of children—but rather polices, regulates, and tears apart Black, Latine, Indigenous, and low-income families. We reject terms that are used to stigmatize people who use drugs and instead strive to use vocabulary that centers individuals and accurately reflects a person’s use or non-use of substances. For more on why, read [here](#).

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