

May 24, 2018

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
US Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human
Services, Education, and Related Agencies
US Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations dedicated to improving the health of our nation's women, infants, and families, we write to ask that you prioritize funding in the fiscal year (FY) 2019 Labor, Health, and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (Labor-HHS) appropriations bill for efforts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to address the United States' alarming maternal mortality rate. **Specifically, we request \$53 million for the CDC's Safe Motherhood program, an increase of \$7 million over FY 2018.** The increase would support CDC's efforts to identify the causes of and how to prevent maternal mortality by bolstering state maternal mortality review committees (MMRCs).

In contrast to every other industrialized nation, maternal deaths in the United States are becoming more common. From 2000 to 2014, the United States' maternal mortality ratio increased by 26.6 percent, from 18.8 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 23.8 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2014.ⁱ Each year, an estimated 700 women in the United States die during pregnancy or in the year after giving birth.ⁱⁱ Of these maternal deaths, an estimated 60 percent are preventable.ⁱⁱⁱ Further, stark racial and ethnic disparities exist in maternal death rates. Black women are almost four times more likely to die from pregnancy-associated causes than white women.^{iv}

The first step to addressing this national crisis is to identify the causes of maternal death across the nation. To that end, thirty-three states have established MMRCs to examine maternal deaths and identify ways to prevent these tragic events in the future. MMRCs are the gold standard in maternal mortality surveillance, bringing together local experts in clinical care, social support, and community health to review individual maternal deaths and make targeted recommendations. Congress can amplify the work of these state-based MMRCs by providing resources to states to establish or expand MMRCs and supporting technical assistance to enhance and standardize data collection.

As you begin drafting the FY 2019 Labor-HHS appropriations bill, we urge you to demonstrate your commitment of America's mothers and families by providing a \$7 million increase to the CDC's Safe Motherhood program. This modest increase will make a significant difference in our understanding of the causes of maternal mortality in the United States and how we can reverse the unacceptable trend in maternal deaths.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please contact Cindy Pellegrini, Senior Vice President, Public Policy and Government Affairs, March of Dimes, at cpellegrini@marchofdimes.org or 202.659.1800.

Sincerely,

Black Mamas Matter Alliance

American College of Nurse-Midwives

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

March of Dimes

National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems

National Partnership for Women & Families

Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health

Preeclampsia Foundation

Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine

ⁱ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5001799/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pregnancy-relatedmortality.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cdcfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/ReportFromNineMMRCs.pdf>

^{iv} <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pmss.html>.