

Energy and Commerce Member Hearing Remarks on Maternal Health

Thank you for allowing me to appear before this committee to discuss an important topic to me, maternal mortality. I'd like to thank my colleague, and member of this committee, Rep. Robin Kelly, for being a champion on this issue. The importance of her legislation, the Mothers and Offspring Mortality and Morbidity Awareness Act, or Momma's Act, cannot be overstated.

The United States has an atrocious record when it comes to maternal mortality. As many on this committee know, our rates of maternal mortality are the highest among other developed nations. What's more concerning is there has been a significant increase in the maternal death rate. From 1991 to 2004, the rate has more than doubled.

That is unacceptable. We need a comprehensive solution to this crisis.

Progress on this important issue has stalled and represents an incredible failure. It is a failure to women throughout this country- especially women of color – who experience maternal mortality at rates three times that that of their white counterparts.

We have a responsibility to mothers, and their families, to make sure that safety and health is our number one priority.

The research is clear. Comprehensive care for pregnant women saves lives. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, sixty percent of maternal deaths are completely preventable. Extending coverage for a full year will save the lives of many of those mothers. And while maternal mortality is certainly the worst outcome, it's not the only outcome. Many women suffer from complex illnesses that complicate their pregnancy and endanger their health.

I shared the story of a constituent of mine recently on the House floor. Her name is Phiffer. She struggles with a mental health disorder. During

her pregnancy in 2014, she had to have an immediate surgical correction for an irregularity in her cervix. The surgery failed, and at 20 weeks she was confined to bedrest for the duration of her pregnancy. Her mental health was not addressed. At thirty weeks, she gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. Her mental health was not addressed. Almost immediately, she began to suffer from postpartum anxiety. She abandoned many things that once gave her joy. It took 12 months for her to finally be diagnosed.

This story is just like millions of others throughout this country. We must do more to improve the range of services available to these young mothers. We must do more to improve care coordination for these young mothers. We must do everything we can to give these young mothers the best possible care.

And so, we are faced with a challenge. Make no mistake that maternal health in this country is in crisis.

The Momma Act will help save the lives of mothers across the country. This Congress has the opportunity to act in the interest of these mothers and families. As you know, the MOMMA act would provide access to life-saving health care for a year after conception for women who use Medicaid. It would also allow for Medicaid coverage of doulas and midwives, expanding access for people who lack access to an OB-GYN doctor.

Not only does this legislation extend coverage for low income women, but it improves maternal health for all women by increasing care coordination by health systems and ensuring that every mother has access to the best possible care. This legislation would help America keep the promise of safety and happiness to these new mothers and infants. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I yield back the balance of my time.