



**Statement for the Record Submitted by
Stacey Brayboy, Senior Vice President, Public Policy and Government Affairs, March of Dimes
Hearing of the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology of the House Committee
on Energy and Commerce
“Strengthening Our Communications Networks to Meet the Needs of Consumers”
Wednesday, October 6, 2021, 12:00 PM**

Chairman Doyle, Ranking Member Latta, and distinguished members of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, thank you for your commitment to addressing the nation’s health equity gap by considering **H.R. 1218, the *Data Mapping to Save Moms Act of 2021***, during today’s hearing. March of Dimes commends you for holding this hearing to examine a topic of utmost importance to maternal and child health.

On behalf of March of Dimes, the nonprofit organization leading the fight for the health of all moms and babies, we appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony for the record. We began that fight more than 80 years ago as an organization dedicated to eradicating polio in the U.S., a goal that we achieved. We continue that fight today as we work to address some of the biggest threats to moms and babies, such as premature birth and maternal mortality, through research, education, programs and advocacy.

March of Dimes’ ongoing work to improve maternal and infant health is more important than ever as our nation is in the midst of a dire maternal and infant health crisis. Rates of preterm birth are increasing, the U.S. is one of the most dangerous places to give birth in the developed world, and there are unacceptable disparities in birth outcomes between women and infants of color and their White peers.

According to another CDC report, severe complications related to pregnancy, known as severe maternal morbidity, impacts over 50,000 women in the U.S. each year¹.

We also know, the health and well-being of mothers and infants are inextricably linked. By improving the health of women before, during and between pregnancies, we can improve outcomes for both them and their infants.

ADDRESSING HEALTH INEQUITY FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

March of Dimes is an active national collaborator and partner working to advance programs, research and policies to ensure that every mom and baby is healthy regardless of wealth, race

or geography. Convening with communities to implement evidence-based strategies that address the social drivers of health to end the healthy equity gap.

The *Mom and Baby Action Network*, led by March of Dimes, is a national 190 member cross-sector partnership that is working to influence and leverage collective action to lead broad changes in policy, research, funding and systems to address the root causes of inequities in maternal and infant health.

This includes improved and enhanced technology to help identify areas with high rates of poor maternal health outcomes and assist in telehealth delivery. For many pregnant women, especially those who live rural, underserved communities, available resources that support maternal health are limited, with the nearest hospital miles away. Ultimately, these mothers and their babies are at-risk.

That is why March of Dimes supports the Data Mapping to Save Moms Act as it seeks to improve telehealth technology for families that don't have easy access to routine appointments. It would do this by directing the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to map areas of the country that have both high rates of maternal health outcomes and gaps in internet service. This information will help identify where improved telehealth services can be implemented.

We also support the bill's requirement to mandate that the General Accountability Office (GAO) provides a report on the effectiveness of internet connectivity in reducing maternal morbidity rates, and identify groups who are best suited to improve the connectivity.

March of Dimes is proud of its data driven work to continue to build partnerships with local public and private organizations to improve maternal and infant health. The efforts from the Subcommittee today are an important step in achieving our goal of confronting poor maternal health outcomes in rural communities, and we applaud your efforts. We urge the swift advancement of this important bill and look forward to working with you toward its enactment.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/severematernalmorbidity.html>