

Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler
Ways and Means Committee
Health Subcommittee
“Overcoming Racial Disparities and Social Determinants
In the Maternal Mortality Crisis”
Thursday, May 16, 2019

Chairman Neal and Ranking Member Brady, thank you for holding this hearing on the increasing maternal mortality and morbidity crisis in the U.S. and the racial disparities that persist within those rates.

Charles Johnson lives by the motto: “Wake up, make Mommy proud, repeat.” As a single father of two boys, Charles strives to honor his late wife by raising awareness of maternal mortality in the U.S. Charles’ wife, Kira, died hours after giving birth to a healthy baby.

As we will hear today, the statistics are shocking and difficult to even comprehend – how can this be happening right now, in the 21st century, in a country whose medical care and technology sets the standard for the rest of the world?

Despite this technological advantage, the U.S. ranks 47th for maternal mortality, we lose between 700 - 900 women each year. This means more mothers die from pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum here in our nation than in any other developed country in the world. And the maternal death rate increases every year.

Perhaps the most heart-wrenching of all is that the CDC estimates that *60 percent* of these deaths could have been prevented.

I want to specifically thank the Committee for shedding light on the racial disparities that exist within maternal mortality rates. Alarming, black mothers are three to four times as likely to die from pregnancy-related deaths as other women. Women in rural areas face higher-than-average death rates as well. And these disparities persist across all levels of socioeconomic status. As a citizen and a mother, that alarms me, and I know we can do better as a country.

As Members of the Committee are aware, we know of many conditions that contribute to high maternal mortality rates, such as cardiovascular disease, obstetric hemorrhage, and hypertension. However, the reality is, the available data on maternal mortality is woefully inadequate.

In working with key leaders in the field of maternal health, they *all* pointed me to Maternal Mortality Review Committees (MMRCs) as being a critical starting point to combat this health crisis. These committees will investigate *every single* pregnancy-related death and make recommendations so that future moms' lives can be saved.

I am proud to say Congress has taken an important first step; the President signed into law my bipartisan *Preventing Maternal Deaths Act* last December. This bill marks the largest step Congress has taken to date to address this crisis. The bill supports and establishes state MMRCs so that we can begin understanding why moms are dying, and what is behind the racial and geographic disparities.

It is exciting to see how this bill has incentivized states to take swift legislative action to establish or improve their MMRC. For instance, New Jersey and Nevada both recently passed bills to establish MMRCs. Just last week, my own state of Washington enacted legislation to strengthen and expand maternal death investigation and reporting.

To close, I will remind each of us that you either are a mom or you have a mom. *Everyone* should care about the tragic reality of maternal mortality in the U.S. Right here in our own communities, mothers are dying, and we must take action to save them.

America should be a safe, welcoming place for every woman to have a baby. It is well past time we stand up for and advocate for the women across our country who choose one of the highest callings: motherhood.

Thank you. I yield back.