

Joint Statement from Congressman Tim Ryan (OH-13), Congresswoman Lauren Underwood (IL-14), Congressman Anthony Gonzalez (OH-16), Congressman Steve Stivers (OH-15)

**Subcommittee on Health
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Wednesday, January 8, 2020 @10:00am**

Thank you, Chairman Pallone, Chairwoman Eshoo, Ranking Member Walden, Ranking Member Burgess, and Members of the Committee, for holding this important hearing today. We are thankful the Committee is starting the year off by prioritizing proposals to improve the health of children and for including our bill, the Healthy Start Reauthorization Act (H.R. 4801), in this effort.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for every 1,000 live births in the United States, nearly six babies will not live to see their first birthday. Worse yet, these numbers are twice as high for black infants in our country. Established by President George H.W. Bush in 1991 as a pilot program, the Healthy Start Program is the federal government's primary initiative to reduce infant mortality. The program identifies and supports communities with infant mortality rates that are at least one and a half times the U.S. national average or increasing above the national average.

To carry out these efforts, Healthy Start takes a community-based approach – working with community organizations, universities, and local health departments to deliver services to women and families before, during, and after pregnancy. Over the years, Healthy Start has sought to gradually improve and build off its established infrastructure – adding a greater emphasis on evidence-based practices and the development of facilitation structures to share information and experiences. These strategies have proven to reduce rates of preterm birth, low birthweight, birth defects, maternal complications, prenatal opioid exposure, neonatal abstinence syndrome, and sleep-related deaths. In fact, infant mortality rates in Healthy Start programs are lower than the national average.

Our bill reauthorizes this important program for five years at an annual funding level of \$135 million, includes some additional language to encourage coordination with the community in

which grantees are located, expands the criteria used to evaluate Healthy Start projects, and instructs the U.S. Government Accountability Office to report back to Congress on this program.

At a time when the need in our communities is so great, we must do all we can to give every child, in every community, a healthy start in life. This vital funding supports our states' most vulnerable communities and ensures more mothers and babies have access to the care they need to reach their fullest potential. Thank you.