

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 13, 2024

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Subcommittee of Labor, HHS, Education and
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Subcommittee of Labor, HHS, Education
Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito:

We thank you for investing in maternal health in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 by enacting provisions of the *Maternal Health Quality Improvement Act* and the *Rural Maternal and Obstetric Modernization of Services (Rural MOMS) Act*, authorized in FY 2022 (P.L. 117-103). As the Subcommittee considers the FY 2025 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, **we respectfully request that you fully fund these authorized programs to ensure these initiatives can fulfill their goal of improving maternal health outcomes, especially for Black, Latina, and Indigenous individuals, and those living in rural areas.**

Addressing maternal mortality and morbidity must continue to be a priority. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 700 women die each year from pregnancy-related complications, and the rate of maternal deaths remains high. In 2021, 1,205 individuals died of maternal causes, a 40 percent increase from 2020.¹ The maternal mortality rate among Black people is more than three times higher than that of white people, and the maternal mortality rate among American Indian and Alaska Native (Indigenous) people is more than two times that of white people.^{2,3} Further, more than 2.2 million women of childbearing age live in “maternity care deserts”, defined as counties with no hospitals offering obstetric care, no birth centers and no other obstetric providers.⁴ Black, Latina, and Indigenous individuals and women living in rural areas are more likely to die due to pregnancy-related causes than their white and urban-dwelling peers. To help address disparities in maternal health outcomes and improve maternal health across the country, investing in programs authorized by the *Maternal Health Quality Improvement Act* and the *Rural MOMS Act* in FY 2025 is critical.

Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health (AIM) Program. The implementation of patient safety bundles and evidence-informed best practices have been shown to reduce preventable maternal deaths, improve maternal outcomes, and close the gap in inequitable

¹ Hoyert DL. Maternal mortality rates in the United States, 2021. NCHS Health E-Stats. 2023. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc:124678>.

² “Racial and Ethnic Disparities Continue in Pregnancy-Related Deaths.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 5 Sept. 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html>.

³ MacDorman MF, Thoma M, Declercq E, Howell EA. Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Maternal Mortality in the United States Using Enhanced Vital Records, 2016–2017. *Am J Public Health*. 2021 Sep;111(9):1673-1681. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2021.306375. Epub 2021 Aug 12. PMID: 34383557; PMCID: PMC8563010

⁴ Brigrance, C., Lucas R., Jones, E., Davis, A., Oinuma, M., Mishkin, K. and Henderson, Z. (2022). Nowhere to Go: Maternity Care Deserts Across the U.S. (Report No. 3). March of Dimes. <https://www.marchofdimes.org/research/maternity-care-deserts-report.aspx>

care. The AIM program has bundles on a range of important maternal safety topics including obstetric hemorrhage, severe hypertension in pregnancy, safe reduction of primary cesarean birth, cardiac conditions in obstetrical care, maternal mental health, sepsis in obstetrical care, and care for pregnant and postpartum people with substance use disorder, as well as an obstetric emergency readiness resource kit. These bundles were designed to reduce maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity by engaging multidisciplinary health care clinicians, public health professionals, and cross-sector stakeholders committed to improving maternal outcomes in the United States.

Ongoing work of AIM includes incorporating concepts and practices of respectful, equitable, and supportive patient care in all bundles, to support the reduction of peripartum racial and ethnic disparities.⁵ The AIM program also continues to provide technical assistance and support capacity building for any state, jurisdiction, and entity implementing the AIM program, including community health centers and Indian Health Service and tribal health care facilities. We urge the Subcommittee to support the funding level of \$30.3 million for the AIM program, consistent with the President’s FY 2025 Budget, to further support the goals of the AIM program, address maternity care deserts, improve patient outcomes, and reduce maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity.

Training for Health Care Providers. Black women bear a disproportionate burden of maternal mortality and morbidity rates in the U.S., a burden that spans income and education levels. Research shows implicit racial bias plays a role in these stark disparities.⁶ Training health care professionals to recognize and remedy biases improves care and reduces inequities in maternal health outcomes. For FY 2025, we urge the Subcommittee to allocate \$5 million to support grants for the training of health care professionals to improve the provision of racial and ethnic minority populations.

Integrated Services for Pregnant and Postpartum Women. Social determinants of health are key factors in caring for obstetric patients. Individuals with unmet social needs, such as housing, food access, and transportation, are more likely to have negative health outcomes.⁷ Patient-centered, integrated health services models can connect obstetric patients to needed social services and supports as well as ensure coordination among clinical care service providers, including providers of mental health and substance use disorder services. We encourage you to provide \$10 million in FY 2025, consistent with the enacted FY 2024 funding level, to foster the development, demonstration, and evaluation of models of care to improve maternal health outcomes in the United States by increasing access to quality, equitable, comprehensive care for pregnant and postpartum people who experience health disparities and have limited access to basic social and health care services.

Rural Obstetric Network Grants. Pregnant individuals residing in rural areas experience maternal mortality rates of up to almost twice the rate of individuals in urban areas.⁸ The inequity is especially concerning given the decline of obstetric care facilities in these rural areas. To address the unique needs of pregnant and postpartum people living in rural areas, the Subcommittee should fund the the rural obstetric network grant program at the

⁵ Alliance for Innovation on Maternal Health, “Patient Safety Bundles”, Available at: <https://saferbirth.org/patient-safety-bundles/>

⁶ Montalant, K.E., Ettinger, A.K. The Racial Disparities in Maternal Mortality and Impact of Structural Racism and Implicit Racial Bias on Pregnant Black Women: A Review of the Literature. *J. Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-023-01816-x>

⁷ Importance of social determinants of health and cultural awareness in the delivery of reproductive health care. ACOG Committee Opinion No. 729. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. *Obstet Gynecol* 2018;131:e43–8.

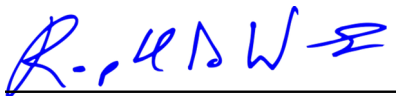
⁸ Katharine A. Harrington, Natalie A. Cameron, Kasen Culler, William A. Grobman, Sadiya S. Khan, “Rural–Urban Disparities in Adverse Maternal Outcomes in the United States, 2016–2019”, *American Journal of Public Health* 113, no. 2 (February 1, 2023): pp. 224–227.

authorized amount of \$3 million in FY 2025. These grants will help identify and implement innovative strategies to improve maternity care, access to care, and collaboration between health care setting in rural areas, frontier areas, maternity care health professional target areas, or tribal entities.

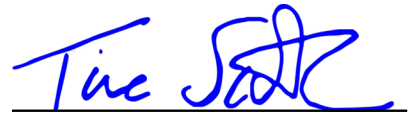
Rural Maternal and Obstetric Care Training Demonstration Program. To address the growing shortage of obstetric health care professionals serving rural areas, we urge the Subcommittee to support the allocation of \$5 million in FY 2025, consistent with the FY 2022 authorized funding level, to facilitate a new demonstration program aimed at increasing the number of rural-based clinicians able to provide prenatal, labor and delivery, and postpartum care, with a special emphasis on health conditions and social determinants of health affecting the rural population. Investing in the Rural Maternal and Obstetric Care Training Demonstration Program will strengthen the effort to address this urgent need.

The programs outlined above are foundational to improving maternity care for populations disproportionately impacted by maternal mortality and morbidity. We urge you to continue to invest in these critical programs and include the *Maternal Health Quality Improvement Act* and the *Rural MOMS Act* in the FY 2025 appropriations bill. Thank you for your consideration of this request and your work to address the nation's maternal health crisis.

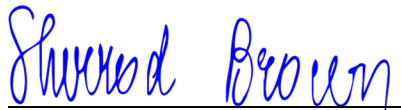
Sincerely,



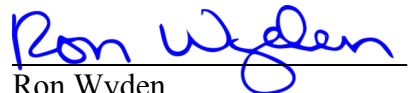
Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



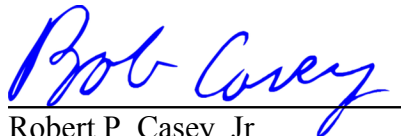
Tina Smith
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



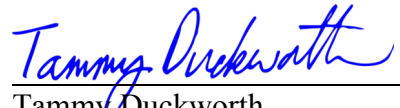
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



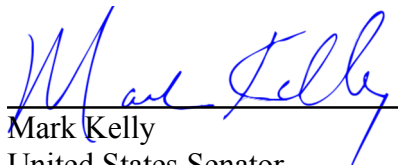
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



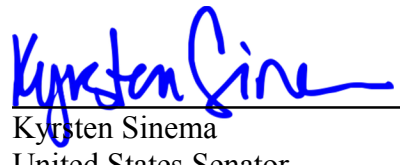
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



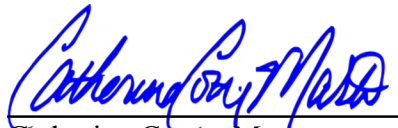
Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



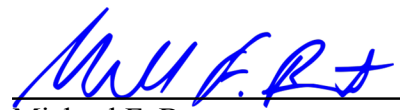
Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
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Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator