

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 21, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear President Biden, Speaker Pelosi, and Majority Leader Schumer,

As negotiations continue on the Build Back Better reconciliation package, we urge you to ensure that critical investments to advance maternal health equity are included in full in the final package. Specifically, we write to express our strong support for all the maternal mortality investments in Sections 31041-31056 and postpartum Medicaid coverage investments in Section 30723 of the Build Back Better Act legislation that has advanced in the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. In total, these provisions cost approximately \$3 billion – a fraction of a percent of the overall package – yet the impact would be significant,¹ and the need could not be more urgent.

As you know, the United States has the highest maternal mortality rate of any high-income country and the only rate that is rising. The pregnancy-related mortality rate for Black and Native Americans is two to four times higher than the rate for white Americans,² and Hispanic and AAPI people also experience elevated rates of maternal mortality and morbidity.³ These trends could worsen due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has put pregnant people at greater risk for adverse birth outcomes.⁴

¹ Jamila Taylor & Anna Bernstein: *Four Ways the Build Back Better Act Could Improve Black Maternal Health*. October 20, 2021.

² National Institutes of Health Office of Research on Women's Health: *Maternal Morbidity and Mortality*. 2019.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Pregnancy-Related Deaths — United States, 2007–2016*. September 6, 2019.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *Investigating the Impact of COVID-19 during Pregnancy*.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/special-populations/pregnancy-data-on-covid-19/what-cdc-is-doing.html>. Accessed June 4, 2021.

Recognizing the pressing need to address these alarming trends, the Energy and Commerce Committee’s Build Back Better Act legislation included historic investments to save moms’ lives, end racial and ethnic maternal health disparities, and advance birth equity across the United States. The legislation would:

- Provide \$175 million in funding for local entities to address social determinants of maternal health like housing, nutrition, and environmental conditions – including a minimum of \$75 million exclusively for community-based organizations working to promote maternal health equity.
- Provide \$275 million to grow and diversify the perinatal health workforce, including nurses, midwives, physicians, doulas, and maternal mental and behavioral health professionals – including \$50 million specifically for doulas.
- Provide \$100 million for maternal mental health equity grant programs.
- Provide \$85 million to address the impacts of climate change-related maternal and infant health risks through health professional schools.
- Provide \$50 million to advance maternal health research at Minority-Serving Institutions like Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and AAPIs.
- Provide \$50 million to promote representative community engagement in Maternal Mortality Review Committees.
- Provide \$160 million to strengthen federal maternal health programs like the CDC’s Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program, Enhancing Reviews and Surveillance to Eliminate Maternal Mortality (ERASE MM), Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).
- Provide \$60 million to expand access to digital tools and technologies that promote maternal health equity.
- Provide \$25 million for bias trainings among health care professionals.

These evidence-based investments from the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act (Momnibus) center the families most severely impacted by our nation’s maternal health crisis, and the provisions were shaped by women of color and local organizations that are on the ground in communities across the country, doing urgently important work to support pregnant people and new parents. To fulfill President Biden’s priority of advancing racial equity in the Build Back

Better reconciliation package,⁵ we must include these investments in full in the final package.

The Build Back Better Plan also includes a mandatory provision from the Mothers and Offspring Mortality & Morbidity Awareness (MOMMA's) and Maximizing Outcomes for Moms through Medicaid Improvement and Enhancement of Services (MOMMIES) Act that will make federal funds permanently available for states to spend on expanded postpartum Medicaid and CHIP coverage to one year in every state, with full state plan benefits throughout pregnancy and the yearlong postpartum period.

This critical investment builds on important progress we made through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which included a provision to create a pathway for states to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage from the current standard of 60 days to one full year after the end of a pregnancy. While this state plan option was a significant step, expanding postpartum coverage remains optional for states, and the American Rescue Plan provision expires in five years. The Build Back Better reconciliation package is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make yearlong postpartum Medicaid coverage a permanent reality for every mom in every state: we must get it done.

Permanently expanding postpartum Medicaid coverage and advancing comprehensive investments in the Momnibus will uphold a principle that is fundamental to the Build Back Better Plan: that in America, every family has a right to thrive—a principle that begins with a safe and healthy pregnancy and birth. We must include these critical maternal health equity investments in the final Build Back Better reconciliation package and we look forward to working with you to deliver on behalf of the mothers, babies, and families who are counting on us.

Sincerely,



Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress



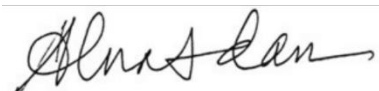
Cory Booker
United States Senator



Robin Kelly
Member of Congress



Joyce Beatty
Member of Congress



Alma Adams
Member of Congress

⁵ White House: *How President Biden's Build Back Better Agenda Helps Black Communities*. August 13, 2021.