

September 8, 2020

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education and Related  
Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education and  
Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

On behalf of the undersigned national, regional and local organizations in the maternal, children's, and mental health space who support the health and wellbeing of pregnant women and new mothers, we respectfully request the inclusion of **\$3.5M funding for a "Maternal Mental Health Hotline"** within the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 LHHS Senate appropriations package, as was included within the House LHHS Report No. 116-450 for H.R. 7614 as amended by H.R. 7617, the omnibus appropriations bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on July 31, 2020.

In normal times, 1 in 5 women are affected by anxiety, depression, and other maternal mental health (MMH) conditions during pregnancy or the year following pregnancy. **These illnesses are the most common complications of pregnancy and childbirth, impacting 800,000 women in the United States each year.**<sup>1</sup> Sadly, MMH conditions often go undiagnosed and untreated, increasing the risk of multigenerational, long-term impact on the physical, emotional, and developmental health of both the mother and child.<sup>2,3</sup> MMH conditions significantly contribute to the United States' high maternal mortality rate; recent studies show that suicide and overdose are the leading causes of death for women in the first year following pregnancy.<sup>4,5</sup> In addition to adverse health consequences, there are significant societal costs of untreated MMH conditions. For example, the estimated cost of untreated MMH conditions for all births in the United States in 2017 is \$14.2 billion due to mothers' lost wages and productivity and addressing poor health outcomes of the impacted babies.<sup>6</sup>

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, pregnant and postpartum women are experiencing unparalleled levels of stress and anxiety, with a recent report showing that women who are pregnant during the pandemic are **almost twice as likely as women who were pregnant prior to the pandemic to report symptoms of anxiety and/or depression.**<sup>7</sup> Equally concerning, new research has shown that high levels of stress among pregnant women has negative impacts on the fetal brain.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, women of color and women who live in poverty are disproportionately impacted by both the pandemic and MMH conditions. Nonprofit organizations and clinicians supporting mothers across the nation are working to meet the increased demand for MMH services. For example, Postpartum Support International, the world's leading nonprofit organization supporting women with MMH conditions, has quadrupled its number of online support groups in the past six months in response to the increasingly complex and urgent requests the organization receives from mothers seeking support.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luca, D., et al (2019). Societal Costs of Untreated Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders in the United States. *Mathematica Policy Research*.

<sup>2</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention website. [www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/depression/index](http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/depression/index).

<sup>3</sup> Luca et al.

<sup>4</sup> Metz, T., et al (2016). Maternal Deaths From Suicide and Overdose in Colorado, 2004–2012. *Obstetrics Gynecol*.

<sup>5</sup> Davis N., et al (2019). Pregnancy-Related Deaths: Data from 14 U.S. Maternal Mortality Review Committees, 2008-2017. Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<sup>6</sup> Luca et al.

<sup>7</sup> Berthelot N., et al (2020). Uptrend in Distress and Psychiatric Symptomatology in Pregnant Women During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic. *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica*.

<sup>8</sup> Wu Y., et al (2020). Association of Maternal Psychological Distress With In Utero Brain Development in Fetuses With Congenital Heart Disease. *JAMA Pediatrics*.

<sup>9</sup> H.R. 7614 (Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations Act, 2021's House Report No. 116-450) included \$3 million for a hotline (later increased via House Floor Amendment to \$3.5 million) to provide a specialized hotline for this group of high-risk women.

A national maternal mental health hotline that offers specialized support 24 hours per day can help mothers and families address MMH conditions before they create long-lasting, adverse health outcomes for mothers and babies. Helpline qualified counselors can provide immediate support to mothers and caregivers, including education, emotional support, and connections to community resources including mental health providers with advanced training in treating MMH conditions, peers with lived experience, support groups, and other local services to support pregnant women and new mothers.

We respectfully request that you include the following report language from the House FY 2021 LHHS Report No. 116-45, as amended by H.R. 7617:

“Maternal Mental Health Hotline.—The U.S. suffers from one of the highest maternal death rates in the developed world with Black and Native American / American Indian women dying at 2-3 times the rate of White women. Suicide and overdose have been identified as the leading causes of death during the first year postpartum and depression is the most common complication of pregnancy in the first year postpartum. To help address these issues, the Committee includes \$3,500,000 to contract with a qualified entity to establish and maintain a maternal mental health hotline to be staffed by qualified counselors, 24 hours a day. Funding may also be used for outreach to raise awareness about maternal mental health issues and the hotline.”<sup>9</sup>

Access to mental health care is critical to the overall health of both mothers and their newborns – more so now than ever. It has always been difficult for childbearing women experiencing anxiety or depression, especially women of color and other under-served groups, to access appropriate mental health care. However, the current situation – with an increase in the range and intensity of mental health issues coupled with the increased pressure on the healthcare system -- has made it even more challenging for these women to access appropriate mental health services. This modest funding will provide a critically needed and cost-effective lifeline to pregnant women and new mothers at the most medically vulnerable time in their lives.

On behalf of the 4 million parents who give birth each year in the United States, we thank you for your attention to this critical matter. Please contact Adrienne Griffen, Executive Director of Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance at [agriffen@mmhla.org](mailto:agriffen@mmhla.org) should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

2020 Mom

All Encompassing Counseling, LLC

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Birth Centers

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American Association of Suicidology

American College of Nurse-Midwives

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American Dance Therapy Association

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Mental Health Counselors Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychiatric Association  
American Psychoanalytic Association  
American Psychological Association  
Amniotic Fluid Embolism Foundation  
Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Arundhuti Kundu M.D., PLLC  
Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare  
Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies  
Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness  
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs  
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses  
Baby Cafe USA  
Birth Sisters Doula Services  
Black Women's Health Imperative  
By Your Side Birth Services, LLC  
California Black Women's Health Project  
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network  
California Women's Law Center  
Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder  
Chisago County Public Health  
Cities Thrive Mental Health Coalition  
Clinical Social Work Association  
Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies  
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
East Tennessee State University  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action  
Education Development Center  
Every Mother Counts  
First 5 Butte  
Foundation for the Advancement of Midwifery  
Frontier Nursing University  
Full Circle Grief Center  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

Grace Center for Maternal and Women's Health  
Hand to Hold  
Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies-MT  
Healthywomen  
Hennepin Healthcare-Redleaf Center for Family Healing  
Hudson Valley Birth Network  
Hyperemesis Education & Research Foundation  
International OCD Foundation  
Jewish Healthcare Foundation  
Johns Hopkins Women's Mood Disorders Center  
Lamaze International  
Legal Action Center  
Lifeline4Moms Center at UMass Medical School  
Marcé of North America  
March for Moms  
March of Dimes  
Mary's Center for Maternal and Child Care  
Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Women's Mental Health  
Maternal and Child Health Access  
Maternal Mental Health NOW  
Mental Health America  
Mental Health America of Ohio  
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance  
Mom & Mind  
Mom.ME.  
Moms Mental Health Initiative  
MomsBloom Inc.  
MomsRising  
MomsWell  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Alliance on Mental Illness Fresno  
National Alliance on Mental Illness Solano  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of County Behavioral Health & Developmental Disability Directors

National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Eating Disorders Association  
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health  
National League for Nursing  
National Register of Health Service Psychologists  
North American Society for Psychosocial Obstetrics and Gynecology  
Perigee Fund  
Perinatal Support Washington  
Postpartum Health Alliance  
Postpartum Resource Center of New York  
Postpartum Support International  
Postpartum Support International – Georgia Chapter  
Preeclampsia Foundation  
Pregnancy and Postpartum Health Alliance of Texas  
Reset Brain + Body  
Residential Eating Disorders Consortium  
Return to Zero: HOPE  
Run Tell Mom LLC  
School Social Work Association of America  
Serenity Therapy Services PLLC  
Social Work Doula LLC  
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine  
Synergize Consulting  
The American Counseling Association  
The Bloom Foundation for Maternal Wellness  
The Center for Emotional Health  
The Greater Good of Northeast Indiana  
The Kennedy Forum  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
The Postpartum Adjustment Center  
The Tatia Oden French Memorial Foundation  
The Trevor Project

This Is My Brave  
Treatment Communities of America  
University of California, Irvine  
Urban Baby Beginnings  
Urban Balance  
US Lactation Consultant Association  
Well Being Trust  
Women's Wisdom Art  
Zero To Three