

March 11, 2021

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

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

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro  
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education and Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Labor,  
Health and Human Services, Education and  
Related Agencies  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Blunt, Chairwoman DeLauro, and Ranking Member Cole,

As you consider the Senate and House Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bills for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, we respectfully request that you address the critical issue of maternal mental health by **increasing funding for the Health Resources and Services Administration's (HRSA) Maternal Mental Health Hotline by \$2 million dollars, and the Screening and Treatment of Maternal Depression and Related Behavioral Disorders Program by \$5 million dollars.**

Maternal mental health (MMH) conditions are the most common complications of pregnancy and childbirth, affecting 1 in 5 women (800,000 people each year in the United States).<sup>1</sup> Recent studies show that suicide and overdose combined are the leading cause of death for mothers in the postpartum period, contributing to the distressingly high maternal mortality rate in the United States.<sup>2,3</sup> Sadly, 75% of those experiencing MMH conditions 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>4,5</sup> The cost of not treating MMH conditions is \$32,000 per mother-infant pair, or \$14.2 billion in accounting for lost wages and productivity of the mother and addressing poor health outcomes of the mother and infant.<sup>6</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated MMH conditions: recent studies show that pregnant women and new mothers are experiencing anxiety and depression during the pandemic at 3-4 times the rate prior to the pandemic.<sup>7,8</sup> Equally concerning, new research shows that high levels of stress among pregnant women can negatively impact the fetal brain.<sup>9</sup> Women of color and women who live in poverty are disproportionately impacted by both the pandemic and MMH conditions, experiencing both at rates 2-3 times higher than white

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

<sup>2</sup> Metz, t., et al (2016). Maternal Deaths From Suicide and Overdose in Colorado, 2004-2012. *Obstetrics Gynecol*.

<sup>3</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>4</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention website. [www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/depression/index](http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/depression/index).

<sup>5</sup> Luca, et al.

<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> Lebel, C., et al (2020). Elevated Depression and Anxiety Among Pregnant Individuals During The COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Affective Disorders*.

<sup>9</sup> Wu Y., et al (2020). Association of Maternal Psychological Distress With In Utero Brain Development in Fetuses With Congenital Heart Disease

women.<sup>10,11</sup>

With thousands of young mothers suffering from MMH conditions, there is a critical need to provide support and treatment before these conditions create long-lasting adverse health outcomes for mother and baby. Thus, we respectfully request that you include increased funding for and report language to address the heightened MMH needs within the FY 2022 Appropriation package to better support more programs to assist mothers across the nation.

Specifically, we request the following language:

**Maternal Mental Health Hotline.** — We request the Committees include \$5 million for the Maternal Mental Health (MMH) Hotline, which is \$2 million above the fiscal year 2021 enacted level. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated MMH conditions, with pregnant women and new mothers experiencing anxiety and depression at rates 3-4 times higher than prior to the pandemic. The Hotline shall provide 24-hour specialized voice and text support that is culturally and linguistically appropriate. The funding shall also be used to raise public awareness about MMH conditions and the Hotline.

**Screening and Treatment of Maternal Depression.** — We request the Committees include a \$5 million increase above the fiscal year 2021 enacted level for the Screening and Treatment of Maternal Depression and Related Behavioral Disorders Program (MDRBD). Although maternal mental health (MMH) conditions are the most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth, almost 75% of those affected remain untreated. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated MMH conditions, with pregnant women and new mothers experiencing anxiety and depression at rates 3-4 times higher than prior to the pandemic. MDRBD programs train health care providers to screen, assess, and treat for MMH conditions and provide specialized psychiatric consultation to assist the providers. HRSA shall make grants to establish new State programs and improve or maintain existing State programs. Grants shall include culturally competent approaches to assist in the reduction of maternal health inequities. The Committee recognizes the high need amongst States and directs MDRBD to provide technical assistance to non-grantee states.

Emotional support and 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 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 and the undersigned national, state and local maternal, child, and mental health organizations, we thank you for your attention to this critical matter. Please contact Jamie Zahlaway Belsito, Policy Director of Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance at [jbelsito@mmhla.org](mailto:jbelsito@mmhla.org) should you have any questions.

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<sup>10</sup> Society for Research in Women's Health website. <https://swhr.org/the-disproportionate-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-of-color/>

<sup>11</sup> Howell, E., et al. (2005). Racial and Ethnic Differences in Factors Associated With Early Postpartum Depressive Symptoms. *Obstet Gynecol.*

Sincerely,

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

2020 Mom

3 Little Birds Counseling, LLC

Altarum

American Academy of Pediatrics

American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

American College of Nurse-Midwives

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American Group Psychotherapy Association

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

Anna Barlage, LMFT, PLLC

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs

Balance By JLouise

Benefit Bump LLC

BEST Doula Training

Bethesda Women's Mental Health

Care Plus New Jersey, Inc.

Black Women's Health Imperative

Brigham and Women's Hospital

Candlelit Therapy, Inc.

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)

Confederation of Independent Psychoanalytic Societies

Dekalb OB/GYN Affiliates

Department of Psychiatry, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

Eichenhofer Psychological Services

Eucalyptus Health

First 5 Butte County Children and Families Commission

First Candle/National SIDS Alliance

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health & Social Justice

Harriet R. Dolinsky, LCSW, Private Practice

Healing Circle Counseling and Services, LLC

Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition of Hawaii

Huddle Up Moms

Hudson Valley Birth Network

International OCD Foundation  
Johnson & Johnson  
Joyful Thoughts LLC  
Kansas American College of Nurse-midwives  
Khursheed K Khine, MD PLLC  
LA Best Babies Network  
LSL Consulting,LLC  
March for Moms  
March of Dimes  
Massachusetts PPD Fund  
Maternal Mental Health NOW  
Maternal Safety Foundation  
Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Program for Moms  
Mental Health America  
Mental Health America of Ohio  
Mission: Motherhood  
Mom Congress  
National Doula Network  
Momology Maternal Wellness Club LLC  
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities  
National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association for Children's Behavioral Health  
National Association for Rural Mental Health  
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
National Association of Social Workers (NASW)  
National Doula Network  
National League for Nursing  
NICU Parent Health  
Nola Nesting  
North Florida Birth Alliance  
Oregon Health & Science University  
Perinatal Support Washington  
Portland State University  
Postpartum Health & Harmony  
SMART Recovery  
Postpartum Resource Center of New York  
Postpartum Support Center  
Postpartum Support International  
Postpartum Support International- Colorado  
Postpartum Support International - Massachusetts  
Postpartum Support International- New Jersey  
Postpartum Support International- Texas  
Postpartum Support International--Delaware Chapter  
Postpartum Support International-Utah Chapter  
Postpartum Wellness

Proverbial Health and Wellness  
Riggbee  
Run Tell Mom  
Sarah E. Herbert, MD, MSW, LLC  
Scrunchy Mama Wellness  
SMART Recovery  
Society of Maternal Fetal Medicine  
Sophie Rudisill, LCSW PLLC  
Speaking of Birth  
The Journey Institute, Inc.  
The National Alliance to Advance Adolescent Health  
The Other Mother - Perinatal Wellness, LLC.  
The Reilly Group, Inc.  
Thriving Families  
University Hospitals  
University of California, San Francisco  
University of Florida  
Urban Baby Beginnings  
Virginia Tech Carilion Clinic