



COMMITTEE ON  
EDUCATION & LABOR  
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STATEMENT

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**Opening Statement of Rep. Tim Walberg (R-MI), Republican Leader  
Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions Joint Hearing:  
"Expecting More: Addressing America's Maternal and Infant Health Crisis"  
January 28, 2020**

(As prepared for delivery)

"Today, we are here to discuss the critical issue of infant and maternal health. While women around the globe are dying less from childbirth, here, in the U.S., the rates have been climbing. Other countries with rising maternal mortality rates? Afghanistan, Lesotho, and Swaziland. For black women, the statistics are even more troubling. According to the World Health Organization, the maternal mortality rates for black women in the U.S. are the same for women in Mexico and Uzbekistan. This is unacceptable.

This issue, a matter of literal life and death for women, demands a serious and thoughtful response.

The exact causes of the United States' high maternal and infant mortality rates are unclear and varied. The HELP Subcommittee has jurisdiction over employment-related health benefits and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, also known as ERISA. So, as we study the important issue before us today, and before this Committee considers the imposition of additional government mandates that could have unintended consequences on employers and employees alike, we should closely examine this problem through separate hearings about the larger issue and proposed legislative solutions. As we have learned from experience, one-size-fits-all government requirements, more often than not, compound the problem. That is why specific policies from this Committee and Congress must involve a thorough review of the current problem and a recognition that community, individual, and family engagement are also key components which need to be recognized and addressed.

Let's not forget the important role employers are playing in providing health insurance to mothers and babies. Because of our strong economy, more workers have access to high-quality, affordable health insurance at work. The most recent Congressional Budget Office numbers indicate that 159 million Americans are covered by employer-sponsored coverage. In addition, maternity benefits are often the largest type of health care expenditures for employers. Because of this, employers proactively offer a number of programs aimed at increasing quality and lowering costs for employees.

Many employers offer programs for fertility, prenatal care, neonatal and premature birth medical care, lactation consulting, and transparency tools to view provider and hospital quality metrics. Employers also rely on payment and delivery-model reforms to reduce scheduled pre-term births; direct high-risk patients to high-quality providers and hospitals; or lower costs by offering bundled payments to providers for childbirth services. Milk-delivery services have also gained popularity with employers by offering convenient shipping services for employees who travel for business.

While employers, communities, and families all play a pivotal role in decreasing maternal and infant mortality rates, we must also ensure that Congress is taking the necessary steps to guarantee the safety and wellbeing of women and newborn and unborn infants. We should promote policies in Washington that encourage a strong family, allow families to flourish, and protect life at all stages, from conception to natural death.

I know that both sides can agree that maternal and infant health is an issue worthy of attention, and it is my hope that we can hold additional legislative hearings on any proposed solutions and that any subsequent legislation can be considered in a bipartisan manner.

Bottom line, bringing a child into the world should be an exciting and joyful time for women and their families, in light of the eternal truth that 'children are a gift...the fruit of the womb is a reward.' Mothers should feel secure and confident in their new role, and not have to fear for their own life or their baby's life.

I thank the Chairwoman for scheduling today's hearing, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses."

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