



COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION & LABOR
REPUBLICANS

COMMITTEE
STATEMENT

**Opening Statement of Rep. Mark Walker (R-NC),
Subcommittee on Workforce Protections Joint Hearing:
"Expecting More: Addressing America's Maternal and Infant Health Crisis"
January 28, 2020**

(As prepared for delivery)

"Thank you, Madame Chairwoman. Bringing a child into the world should be an exciting and joyful time for women and their families, not one clouded by fear and worry.

Unfortunately, infant and maternal mortality rates in the U.S. paint an abysmal picture. From 1990 to 2015, the U.S. maternal mortality rate increased by 34 percent. To put that number into perspective, the global rate for maternal mortality decreased by 44 percent over the same time. As for U.S. infant mortality rates, they are declining, but remain 71 percent higher than the comparable country average.

Considering that the cause of these worsening and troublesome trends is unclear, we must be cautious of implementing government mandates on employers that could end up doing more harm than good.

With that said, public policy has an important role to play in this issue, which is why there are protections under federal law that safeguard mothers and their newborn babies' health.

For example, the *Fair Labor Standards Act* (FLSA) requires employers to provide reasonable workplace accommodations and break time for nursing mothers for one year after their child's birth.

Women with children are the fastest-growing segment of the workforce. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, six in every 10 new

mothers are in the workforce. So, the types of accommodations included in the FLSA help our nation's workers and job creators succeed.

We agree that maternal and infant mortality trends are an important concern which deserves our attention. In the past, Congress has been able to come together in a bipartisan manner to tackle serious policy challenges. Last year, Congress passed H.R. 6, the *SUPPORT Patients and Communities Act*, bipartisan legislation to address the opioid crisis, including mothers and infants affected by this terrible epidemic. Our hope is that we can continue this bipartisan work as we discuss solutions to address maternal and infant health here today.

In closing, hundreds of maternal deaths occur every year. These statistics are heartbreaking. As a nation with some of the most advanced obstetric and emergency care, we can and should do better. But it is important that we legislate with a reasoned approach backed by a careful examination of the issue, which is why this hearing is a good starting point.

Again, thank you, Madame Chairwoman for scheduling today's hearing. I look forward to a thoughtful discussion and hearing from our witnesses on how we can improve maternal and infant health outcomes."

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