

April 15, 2021

The Honorable Mark Takano  
Chair  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
B234 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Bost  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
3460 O'Neill House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20024

The Honorable Julia Brownley  
Chair  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Health  
Subcommittee  
2262 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Bergman  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Health  
Subcommittee  
566 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Takano, Ranking Member Bost, Chairwoman Brownley, and Ranking Member Bergman:

The undersigned 34 organizations, dedicated to improving maternal and child health, thank you for considering H.R. 958, the Protecting Moms Who Served Act, in today's legislative hearing in the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Health Subcommittee. We strongly support this bipartisan bill and appreciate your leadership in addressing our nation's maternal mortality crisis.

As we work to end preventable maternal deaths, we are concerned by the paucity of data on maternal health outcomes among veterans. The Protecting Moms Who Served Act, led by Representatives Lauren Underwood, Gus Bilirakis, Julia Brownley, and Brian Fitzpatrick, would help inform us of the scope of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity among veterans, with a particular focus on racial and ethnic disparities, as well as make critical investments in maternity care coordination through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Women are currently the fastest growing group within the veteran population. However, while pregnant veterans and new moms receive most health care services within the VA health system, maternity care is not provided directly in VA facilities. Instead, the VA partners with community-based obstetric clinicians. The Veteran's Health Administration has established maternity care coordination programs, proven to help ensure that veterans receive high-quality and culturally congruent care from community-based clinicians, and that robust social supports are in place to address the broad range of needs veterans will face during pregnancy, through labor and delivery, and the twelve-month postpartum period.

The Protecting Moms Who Served Act would provide critical support for maternity care coordination programs to address the clinical and nonclinical perinatal needs of veterans and ensure effective coordination between VA and non-VA facilities in the delivery of maternity care and other health care services. These investments would facilitate access to community resources to address social determinants of health including nutrition and housing assistance, identify mental and behavioral health risk factors in the prenatal and postpartum periods and provide follow-up treatment options, and strengthen community partnerships with organizations that provide support services for new moms. Other examples of supports available through VA maternity care coordination include classes on childbirth preparation, lactation, and parenting; breast pumps and breastfeeding support; and nutrition counseling. Additionally, this bill would invest in trainings for community maternity care providers to better understand and serve the unique needs of pregnant and postpartum veterans, with a particular focus on mental and behavior health conditions, which may often be caused or exacerbated by military service and

the transition back to civilian life. These investments will help ensure that veterans who are pregnant or postpartum have access to the vital care and resources necessary to address their unique health needs.

The Protecting Moms Who Served Act would also commission a comprehensive study on maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity among veterans, with a focus on racial and ethnic inequities in maternal health outcomes. The study will make recommendations for the improvement of maternal health data collection processes and steps to reduce adverse maternal health outcomes among veterans. To prevent pregnancy-related complications in the future, we need a complete understanding of the unique risks facing veterans, including post-traumatic stress disorder and military sexual trauma. This report will be critical to informing efforts to invest in and expand programs proven to serve this unique population and improve maternal health outcomes.

The Protecting Moms Who Served Act is an important step towards eliminating preventable maternal mortality and severe morbidity among veterans and reducing racial and ethnic inequities in outcomes. We are proud to support this legislation and look forward to working with you to get this important bipartisan bill enacted into law.

Sincerely,

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American College of Nurse-Midwives  
American College of Physicians  
Anthem, Inc.  
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs  
Blue Cross Blue Shield Association  
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)  
Center for Reproductive Rights  
Equitable Maternal Health Coalition  
Every Mother Counts  
HOPE Registry  
Jennifer Bush-Lawson Foundation  
March for Moms  
March of Dimes  
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance  
MomsRising  
NARAL Pro-Choice America  
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health  
National Birth Equity Collaborative  
National Partnership for Women & Families  
National Perinatal Information Center  
National WIC Association  
National Women's Law Center  
Palladium  
Physicians for Reproductive Health  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
Postpartum Support International  
Power to Decide  
Restoring Our Own Transformation (ROOTT)  
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine  
The 2 Degrees Foundation  
The Joint Commission  
U.S. Breastfeeding Committee