

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 15, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write to express our strong support for the inclusion of policies to address America's Black maternal health crisis in future legislative packages to continue our nation's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic and build back better. The pandemic has disproportionately harmed Black people in the United States—including by exacerbating the preexisting maternal health crisis. It is imperative that the federal government make further comprehensive investments to improve maternal health outcomes and eliminate maternal health disparities for Black people in the United States.

Across the United States, Black people disproportionately experience complications and die during pregnancy and childbirth. Black people are three to four times more likely to experience pregnancy-related death.¹ Black people display earlier signs of preeclampsia and are at three times the risk of postpartum hemorrhaging as white people.² Chronic stress caused by racism and discrimination has been linked to adverse health outcomes for Black people at all stages of life.³ These alarming trends span all income and education levels.⁴

The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated America's Black maternal health crisis. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, pregnant and recently pregnant people are at an increased risk for severe illness from the coronavirus, and pregnant people who become infected with the coronavirus are at an increased risk for adverse pregnancy outcomes.⁵

¹ Dr. Andreea A. Creanga et al., *Pregnancy-Related Mortality in the United States, 2011–2013*, *Obstetrics and Gynecology* (Aug. 2017) (online at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28697109/#affiliation-1>).

² Dr. Sajid Sahulet et al., *Racial Disparities in Comorbidities, Complications, and Maternal and Fetal Outcomes in Women with Preeclampsia/Eclampsia, Hypertension in Pregnancy* (Nov. 2015) (online at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4782921/); Dr. Heba M. Eltoukhi et al., *The Health Disparities of Uterine Fibroids for African American Women: A Public Health Issue*, *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* (Mar. 2014) (online at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3874080/).

³ The Century Foundation, *Racism, Inequality, and Health Care for African Americans* (Dec. 19, 2019) (online at <https://tcf.org/content/report/racism-inequality-health-care-african-americans/>).

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Racial and Ethnic Disparities Continue in Pregnancy-Related Deaths* (Sept. 5, 2019) (online at www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2019/p0905-racial-ethnic-disparities-pregnancy-deaths.html).

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Investigating the Impact of COVID-19 During Pregnancy* (May 13, 2021) (online at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/special-populations/pregnancy-data-on-covid-19/what-cdc-is-doing.html).

The economic impacts of the coronavirus pandemic—including increased food and housing insecurity—have worsened preexisting health disparities for Black people.⁶

Under your leadership, our nation has taken significant steps to combat the Black maternal health crisis. Most significantly, using the framework of your American Rescue Plan, Congress enacted an option for states to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage to a full year following pregnancy—a reform that will allow new mothers to access health care for the full postpartum period. Beginning in April 2022, states will have this option for five years.⁷

On May 6, 2021, the Committee on Oversight and Reform held a hearing to examine the maternal mortality and morbidity crisis experienced by Black birthing people in the United States. During this hearing, advocates, health care providers, and medical experts testified to the urgent need for further investments to address the disproportionate risk of death and adverse outcomes Black people experience before, during, and after pregnancy.⁸

Your American Families Plan proposes a \$3 billion investment to improve maternal health.⁹ This funding would provide an opportunity to permanently extend postpartum Medicaid coverage to one full year—as proposed in Congresswoman Robin Kelly’s MOMMA’s Act and Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley’s MOMMIES Act¹⁰—and to comprehensively address every dimension of America’s maternal health crisis—as proposed in the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act, championed by Black Maternal Health Caucus Co-Chairs Lauren Underwood and Alma Adams.¹¹

America’s Black maternal health crisis is rooted in its historical and ongoing legacy of systemic racism, and our nation’s recovery must address the health disparities that left Black mothers and families in crisis even before the coronavirus struck. We ask for your continued leadership in support of policies that would build upon the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to end our nation’s Black maternal health crisis.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

⁶ Dr. Leo Lopez III, Dr. Louis H. Hart III, and Dr. Mitchell H. Katz, *Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities Related to COVID-19*, *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Jan. 22, 2021) (online at <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2775687>).

⁷ American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2.

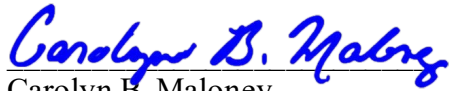
⁸ Committee on Oversight and Reform, *Birthing While Black: Examining America’s Black Maternal Health Crisis* (May 6, 2021) (online at <https://oversight.house.gov/legislation/hearings/birthing-while-black-examining-america-s-black-maternal-health-crisis>).

⁹ White House Gender Policy Council, *How the American Rescue Plan, the American Jobs Plan, and the American Families Plan Meet the Moment for Moms this Mother’s Day* (May 9, 2021) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/blog/2021/05/09/how-the-american-rescue-plan-the-american-jobs-plan-and-the-american-families-plan-meet-the-moment-for-moms-this-mothers-day/).

¹⁰ H.R. 1897, 116th Cong. (2019); H.R. 3063, 117th Cong. (2021).

¹¹ H.R. 959.

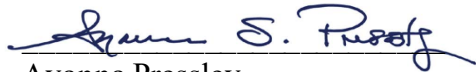
Sincerely,



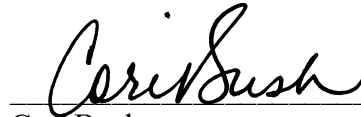
Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform



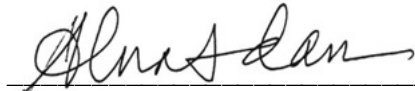
Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



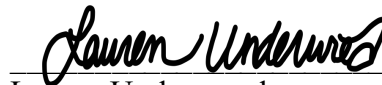
Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



Cori Bush
Member of Congress



Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Co-Chair
Black Maternal Health Caucus



Lauren Underwood
Co-Chair
Black Maternal Health Caucus

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform