

Child Care Assistance for Maternal Health



Led by Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan (VA-04) and Congresswoman Nancy Mace (SC-01)

MATERNAL HEALTH AND CHILD CARE ACCESS

The United States continues to face a maternal health crisis affecting mothers and families across the country. In 2021, the maternal mortality rate was nearly 33 deaths per 100,000 live births, which is over three times the rate in most other high-income countries. There are also significant racial and ethnic maternal health disparities, and the maternal mortality rate for Black women is almost three times higher than the rate for white women [1].

Maternal deaths result from a myriad of physical and mental health conditions during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period—many of which could be prevented. The recovery process from pregnancy and childbirth, sleep deprivation, and the demands of caring for a newborn as well as other children in the family can cause overwhelming physical stress. The mental health challenges are equally significant. According to 2017-2019 data from Maternal Mortality Review Committees, mental health conditions were the leading cause of pregnancy-related deaths [2].

Comprehensive support—including access to child care—is necessary to help mothers with balancing their own health, bonding with a new baby, caring for other children, and managing additional responsibilities. In fact, psychological stress exacerbated by challenges finding child care has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of maternal depression, and research shows child care access can have positive impacts on both maternal and child mental health [3].

THE SOLUTION

The Child Care Assistance for Maternal Health Act would increase access to short-term child care to improve the physical health, mental health, and wellness of mothers and families. Specifically, it:

- Establishes a federal grant program to support mothers and families during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period by increasing access to short-term child care.
- Prioritizes grant applicants that provide families with assistance finding a long-term child care option, serve areas with high rates of maternal mortality and poverty, and serve maternity care target areas.
- Prioritizes support for vulnerable populations, including low-income families, families experiencing homelessness, single-parent households, and families with children with disabilities or special health care needs.
- Requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to identify successful activities for improving maternal health outcomes and provide reports to Congress.

ENDORSEMENTS

The Child Care Assistance for Maternal Health Act is endorsed by the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs, Bipartisan Policy Center, First Five Years Fund, March of Dimes, Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance, Mom Congress, the Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health, and Zero to Three.

Citations

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2021/maternal-mortality-rates-2021.htm>
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2022/p0919-pregnancy-related-deaths.html>
3. <https://www.issuelab.org/resources/42354/42354.pdf>