

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 12, 2019

The Honorable Roy Blunt  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education & Related Agencies  
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education & Related Agencies  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As you develop the appropriations legislation for Fiscal Year 2020, we encourage you to prioritize the highest-possible funding level for the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This program builds on lessons learned from previous public health emergencies and leverages existing public health surveillance capacity to track emerging public health threats to mothers and babies and inform actions to improve health outcomes.

Pregnant women, babies, and young children are among the most vulnerable populations during public health emergencies and natural disasters. The 2009 H1N1 pandemic flu and the 2015-2016 Zika virus epidemic demonstrated the devastating health outcomes that can result from infectious disease exposures to pregnant women and their babies. More recently, an increasing number of babies have been born with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) as a tragic consequence of the opioid epidemic. It is critical that we implement a sustained comprehensive approach to ensure that babies born with NAS and mothers who are struggling with opioid use disorder have access to evidence-based care and long-term support services. Environmental hazards like lead or perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) also pose unique risks to pregnant women, infants, and children. Rapid data collection regarding maternal and child health during public health emergencies can inform emergency response activities, guide health care providers, and connect families to appropriate care and support services.

In Fiscal Year 2019, the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program is continuing surveillance in up to nine states and territories of some of the more than 7,000 infants and children impacted by Zika virus infection in the United States. The surveillance activities under the program allow for continued monitoring of women and children effected by the Zika virus for at least two years after the birth of the child. This continued surveillance allows researchers to inform health care professionals on how to best provide treatment and long-term care for affected children and their families. The program is also assisting at least one state or

territory in adapting the public health surveillance platform built in response to Zika to respond to an additional emerging threat to the mothers and infants in those states and territories.

With additional funding, CDC could undertake activities needed across the country to better protect the nation's mothers and babies from ongoing and emerging threats. This approach would provide public health and clinical communities with the resources needed to monitor pregnant women and children effected by public health crises, and allow researchers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term health impacts on this vulnerable population. The program could also be leveraged to meet the specific ongoing needs of states and communities across the country, including those working to address the opioid epidemic, environmental hazards, natural disasters, and infectious diseases.

Thank you for your consideration of this request to prioritize the highest-possible funding level for the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies to better pregnant women, infants, and children from public health threats.

Sincerely,



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



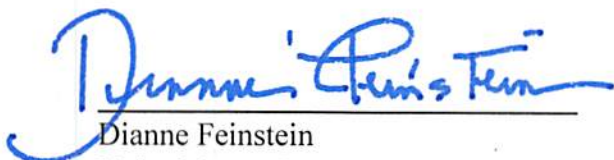
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator