United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 29, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-221 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Chairman Shelby, and Vice Chairman Leahy:

As Congress weighs options for federal support in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge you to ensure that robust funding is provided for the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the next COVID-19 stimulus package. The Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program was established to detect and respond to public health crises that threaten the health and wellbeing of pregnant and postpartum people, and infants and young children. Unfortunately, the program has not received sufficient funding in recent years to sustain a nationwide, real-time system to identify and respond to threats to this at-risk population. Now, more than ever, it is critical that this program is provided with $100 million in emergency funding to ensure support for vulnerable communities, health departments, and at-risk families across the country throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a recent study published by the New England Journal of Medicine, researchers collected data from two New York City hospitals that implemented universal testing among pregnant women admitted for delivery. As a result, the hospitals found that roughly 88 percent of the pregnant patients who tested positive presented no symptoms of COVID-19.[1] Another early analysis of COVID-19 patients suggests that cases may be more severe in infants compared to older children and teenagers.[2] While these reports have provided limited insight to the impact of this virus on these populations, for individuals who are pregnant and postpartum, or for families with infants and young children, the short-term and long-term health implications of COVID-19 remain uncertain. If robustly funded, the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program would work to fill the knowledge gaps in clinical care using real-time data collection and help direct public health resources.

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[1] https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2009316
[2] https://www.businessinsider.com/some-children-develop-severe-infections-from-coronavirus-2020-3

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Pregnant patients are at a higher risk of severe illness when infected with respiratory viruses similar to COVID-19, such as influenza,[3] and most prenatal and postpartum patients and their infants interact with the health care system at higher rates than the average American due to number of prenatal, postpartum, and labor and delivery services needed to ensure their continued health and safety. Yet, to date, CDC has not released sufficient recommendations specific to the care, evaluation, or management of COVID-19 for pregnant patients or infants. Moving forward, it is critical that public health officials have the resources to ensure effective data collection so that pregnant and postpartum patients, infants, and young children are cared for using evidence-based practices.

During the Zika virus outbreak, the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program helped local and state public health officials ensure the collection of real-time data to help inform clinical guidance, identify communities with local transmission, and appropriately allocate scarce public health resources. By funding the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program at $100 million in the next COVID-19 stimulus package, lawmakers can help ensure that local and state health departments across the country to collect and analyze data on the impact of COVID-19 on pregnant and postpartum patients and their newborns.

We thank you for your support of the Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Mothers and Babies program and hope that you will work to ensure the inclusion of $100 million in emergency funding for this critical program in the next COVID-19 stimulus package.

<div align="center">Sincerely,</div>

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan

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Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

/s/ Tom Carper

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Tom Carper
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

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Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Sherrod Brown

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Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

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[3] https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fhcp%2Fpregnant-women-faq.html

/s/ Ron Wyden

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Ron Wyden
United States Senator

/s/ Kyrsten Sinema

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Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

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Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

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Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Kirsten Gillibrand

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Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

/s/ Dianne Feinstein

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Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator