

June 18, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander,
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions,
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Michael Bennet
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Senator Bennet,

First Focus thanks you for introducing the reauthorization of the Prematurity Research Expansion and Education for Mothers who deliver Infants Early Act (PREEMIE Act). This law, which focuses on strategies to reduce the devastating toll of preterm births, has had a positive and measurable impact on our understanding of the root causes of prematurity, which in addition to exposing children to a host of negative health and developmental conditions, is one of the leading causes of infant mortality.

As a leading national organization working to improve the health and well-being of America's children and pregnant women, First Focus commends you for spearheading a bipartisan bill, which will continue research on the underlying causes of pre-term birth.

According to 2016 Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data, pre-term birth affected approximately 1 of every 10 infants born in the United States. CDC research also showed that pre-term birth rates decreased from 2007 to 2014. However, the rate of pre-term birth rose in 2015 and 2016. Additionally, racial and ethnic disparities in pre-term birth rates remain high, particularly for African-American and Native-American women, which in turn contributes to the growing racial disparities in the infant mortality rates among African American and Native American women. As you are aware, black babies are 2.5 times more likely to die and Native American babies are 1.6 times more likely to die before their first birthday than white babies.

Although these disparities are associated with many factors, such as socioeconomic status, lack of prenatal care, nutrition, and the mother's age, among others, the issue known as "weathering" must be more closely studied. Weathering refers to the toxic effects of exposure to chronic discrimination and racialized stress on black and other women of color, regardless of socio-economic status, that contributes to poor health and birth outcomes, including infant mortality.

We urge you to continue to work with the administration, health care providers, researchers and advocates to confront this crisis. First Focus is ready to partner with both of your offices to enact the PREEMIE Act so that we take additional actions to address this important issue that impacts far too many pregnant woman, children, and families.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President