

October 25, 2021

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives

Texas Congressional Delegation

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Members of the Texas Delegation in Congress,

We are writing today to urge you to strongly support two critical but lower-profile provisions in the Build Back Better budget reconciliation bill to support healthy moms and healthy children. Specifically, we urge you to encourage congressional leaders to ensure that the bill maintains the provision allowing mothers to remain enrolled in their Medicaid health coverage for 12 months after pregnancy and the provision allowing children to remain enrolled in their Medicaid or CHIP health insurance for 12 continuous months. While we also support other provisions in the original draft of the Build Back Better bill, particularly the provision to permanently close the health coverage gap in states that have not implemented Medicaid expansion, we want to ensure that Congress is paying attention to the low-cost, high-impact provisions on postpartum coverage for mothers and continuous coverage for children.

The provision to support healthy moms would have a significant positive impact in Texas, where approximately one-quarter of women of childbearing age were uninsured prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. A full year of comprehensive health coverage for mothers after pregnancy was the top recommendation of the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee appointed by Governor Greg Abbott. The Review Committee has also warned that Black mothers in Texas are at much higher risk of maternal mortality compared to other mothers — one of the reasons that implementing 12 months of postpartum coverage is a key step towards addressing racial disparities in Texas and nationwide. Greater access to health coverage would help prevent maternal deaths — and maternal mortality is just the tip of the iceberg. Many more Texas moms face medical issues and complications in the year following pregnancy, such as postpartum depression, cardiac arrest, infection, and extreme blood loss or hemorrhage. These issues often lead to extra hospital stays, create long-term health problems for mothers, affect infants and toddlers during the critical years of early brain development, and generate higher costs to Medicaid and the state. In fact, a 2021 report by Mathematica found that failing

to treat maternal mental health conditions costs Texas \$2.2 billion for one year of births due to productivity losses, child and behavioral and developmental disorders, maternal health expenditures, and preterm births.

The Texas Legislature has recognized the importance of addressing this maternal health issue, but it has not passed 12-month postpartum coverage. This year, 12-month postpartum coverage passed the Texas House on a strong bipartisan vote, although the bill was reduced to 6-month postpartum coverage before it was ultimately passed and signed by the Governor. We deeply appreciate the Legislature's work, although there is more left to do.

Texas is also one of the states that would benefit most from the children's health care provision in the Build Back Better bill. Texas has the nation's highest uninsured rate for children. In fact, Texas was responsible for one-third of the total increase in the number of children who lost health insurance from 2016 to 2019 in the United States. While children of all racial/ethnic backgrounds have high uninsured rates in Texas, Hispanic children in particular are disproportionately uninsured — one of the reasons that continuous health coverage for children must be part of a health equity agenda.

According to an analysis by Urban Institute, almost half of the uninsured children in Texas prior to the pandemic were eligible for Medicaid but unenrolled. Part of the challenge is that eligible children often cycle on and off of Medicaid health insurance due to monthly fluctuations in their family income. That process hurts children's health outcomes and continuity of care as they miss doctors' appointments, support for mental health, speech therapy sessions, medications, immunizations, and school. It also creates more administrative burdens for the state, doctors, insurance companies, and families. The state's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) avoids many of these challenges by offering 12 months of continuous coverage for most children.

As they did with maternal health, this year our state legislators recognized the importance of addressing this challenge, although they did not fully resolve it. We are grateful to the Legislature for passing a bill to reduce the number of inaccurate mid-year eligibility reviews in Children's Medicaid. However, to ensure that eligible children can remain enrolled in their health insurance and receive consistent, reliable health care, the state's Children's Medicaid program should offer 12 months of continuous health coverage. By taking this step, Congress will ensure more children get the health care they need and are more likely to succeed in school, graduate from high school and attend college, earn higher wages, and grow up into healthy adults.

We urge you to ensure that Congress uses the opportunity presented by the Build Back Better bill to take these important steps to support healthy kids and healthy moms. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists - District XI (Texas)

Any Baby Can

Autism Society of Texas

Center for Civic and Public Policy Improvement

CHILDREN AT RISK

Children's Defense Fund - Texas

Circle Up United Methodist Women

City of Austin

Clarity Child Guidance Center

Council For A Strong America- Texas

East Texas Human Needs Network

Every Body Texas

Every Texan

Geoffray Strategies, LLC

Hand to Hold

Healthy Futures of Texas

Houston Area Women's Center

Jewish Family Service Houston

Jolt Action

La Fe Policy Research and Education Center

Legacy Community Health

Mental Health America Greater Houston

Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.

Nacogdoches Area United Way

NAMI Texas of Palestine

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas

National Association of Social Workers - Texas Chapter

National Council of Jewish Women Greater Dallas

Network of Behavioral Health Providers

New Hope Housing

North Texas Area Community Health Centers

Paso del Norte Center of Hope

Postpartum Support International-Texas
Pregnancy and Postpartum Health Alliance of Texas (PPHA)
Proyecto Azteca
Texans Care for Children
Texas Academy of Family Physicians
Texas AFL-CIO
Texas Association of Community Health Plans
Texas Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Texas Hospital Association
Texas Medical Association
Texas Parent to Parent
Texas Pediatric Society, the Texas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Texas Physicians for Social Responsibility
Texas Women's Healthcare Coalition
TexProtects
The Good Life Outcomes program, at Change Happens!
UnidosUS
United Way for Greater Austin
United Way of Denton County
United Way of Metropolitan Dallas
United Way of Tarrant County
United Ways of Texas
Valley AIDS Council
Young Invincibles

CC:

The Honorable Bernie Sanders Chair, Senate Committee on the Budget
The Honorable Patty Murray Chair, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
The Honorable Ron Wyden Chair, Senate Committee on Finance
The Honorable Bobby Scott Chair, House Committee on Education and Labor
The Honorable John Yarmuth Chair, House Committee on the Budget
The Honorable Richard Neal Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means