



FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

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September 25, 2018

Elizabeth Spencer, R.N.
Deputy Director, Office of Research on Women's Health, Executive Secretary, ACRWH
National Institutes of Health
6707 Democracy Boulevard, Room 7W444
Bethesda, MD 20817

Dear Ms. Spencer:

Thank you for providing First Focus the opportunity to provide a comment letter for the October 23, 2018 meeting of the Advisory Committee on Research on Women's Health at the National Institutes of Health. We applaud your mission to offer guidance and make recommendations on issues affecting women's health.

First Focus urges the Committee to continue its effort to study the devastating impact of maternal and infant mortality in the United States. The social determinants of health have dire consequences for many of those most vulnerable in our society. However, many studies have shown it has a particularly acute effect on African American women.

The United States has made strides in reducing its infant mortality rate. Between 1996 and 2016, the infant mortality rate per 1,000 births was reduced from 7.7 percent to 5.6 percent—a 27 percent decrease. Unfortunately, 5.6 percent is still significantly high, and much more can, and should, be done. The United States is still one of only 13 countries where the rate of maternal mortality related to pregnancy or childbirth is worse than it was 25 years ago.

Not all women face the same risks during pregnancy and childbirth. African American women in the United States are between three and four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than White women.

We understand these are complex issues, which is why we request that you further study, on a state-by-state basis, the underlying causes of the disproportionate impact of maternal and infant mortality within the African American community across the nation.

The disparity in maternal and infant mortality among African-American women, compared to their peers is too high and, even controlling for socio-economic status, it remains at an unacceptable level. As the NIH knows, where an African American woman resides clearly affects her maternal health outcomes. The Department of Health and Human Services has

made clear that states with larger proportions of African American women have worse maternal health outcomes. However, more data at the state level can help develop an effective federal response.

This is why First Focus is urging the Committee to acquire data from all 50 states in order to properly understand the cause of this crisis and develop a strategy for a solution. As a nation, we can and must do more to protect all women, but we must first find the underlying cause of this crisis.

First Focus stands as your partner in researching this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bruce Lesley". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bruce Lesley
President