



Testimony to the House Committee on Public Health
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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Patrick Bresette, I am Executive Director of the Texas office of the Children's Defense Fund.

CDF-Texas is a member of "Cover Texas Now," a broad coalition of consumer and faith-based organizations that desire to see the state of Texas implement a sustainable health care system and provide quality affordable health coverage to all its people.

Our coalition appreciates the work you have undertaken during this interim to ensure that Texas policies and programs do the best they can to support healthy mothers, healthy pregnancies, and healthy babies, and to reduce maternal deaths and morbidity in our state.

Today, I am delivering to you a joint letter signed by 17 organizations urging you to consider the impact that the state's high uninsured rate has on our ability to address these issues.

The organizations who have signed onto this letter agree with the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Task Force that **increasing access to healthcare before, after and in between pregnancies is key to reducing the cases of maternal mortality and morbidity and supporting healthy babies.**

As part of its in-depth review of maternal death cases, the Task Force found that a majority of pregnancy-related deaths in 2012 were potentially preventable and that a significant number were related to chronic illnesses and conditions.

The Task Force recognized that efforts to save moms' lives must address factors specific to individual patients and families and the system- and community-level drivers that

influence a woman's health throughout her life, including access to care between pregnancies.

Our current inadequate approach to maternal health also has significant consequences for the healthy development of Texas babies. **More than 1 in 10 Texas babies is born too early (pre-term) and 1 in 12 babies is born too small** in Texas (weighing less than 5.5 pounds), rates that have consistently been higher than the national average over the past 10 years.

To support maternal and child health and expand women's access to healthcare, one of the most important steps state leaders can take is to ensure that more low-income women in Texas have a way to get affordable health coverage. Right now, Texas has the highest uninsured rate and highest number of uninsured residents in the nation. In fact, **more than 1 in 4 Texas women of reproductive age (age 15 to 44) lack health insurance (about 1.5 million Texas women).**

Many women who work as child care teachers, waitresses, construction workers, sales clerks, janitors, or in other low-wage jobs don't receive insurance from their employers and don't make enough to buy insurance.

The federal government offers states expanded Medicaid funding to provide a health insurance option to this exact population, but so far Texas leaders have turned down the funding. It is past time for Texas to utilize these funds to meet the needs of our families and communities.

Texas voters have made clear that they want the Legislature to work on this issue. In a recent poll, **89 percent** said it was a "top priority" or "important" for the Legislature to work on reducing maternal deaths, and **87 percent** said the same thing about the Legislature improving access to health insurance.

For the sake of healthy moms and healthy babies, and in order to address many of the other challenges facing the state, Texas leaders must work on a plan to reduce the state's high uninsured rate and connect more low-wage women to affordable insurance options.

We urge this committee to recommend providing women continuous healthcare coverage throughout their lives in order to improve the lives of moms and babies across our state.