



Opening Statement

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott • Chairman

Opening Statement of Chairwoman Alma Adams (NC-12)

Joint Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions and Workforce Protections Hearing

Expecting More: Addressing America's Maternal and Infant Health Crisis

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Tuesday, January 28, 2020 | 10:15am

Thank you, Chairwoman Wilson. As the co-chair of the Black Maternal Health Caucus alongside Ms. Underwood, I am grateful for today's bipartisan opportunity to focus on our role in addressing America's maternal and infant health crisis.

This crisis is devastating communities across the country, particularly Black and Native communities that experience far worse outcomes than their white counterparts. However, in some places in the country, such as in my home state of North Carolina, there are strategies in place that have been proven to work in reducing these disparities. It's up to us as lawmakers to make it easier for our caregivers to take what works and expand upon it.

Today, our witnesses will help us understand and address the causes behind pregnancy-related mortality and morbidity that hit our communities every day.

As Chairwoman Wilson noted, expanding access to affordable health care and nutrition services is an important part of the solution. However, as women increasingly work later into their pregnancies and return to work shortly after the baby is born, we must also ensure that our workplaces support the health of mothers and infants. In this area, federal law falls woefully short.

For example, federal law currently does not guarantee all new mothers the right to express breast milk. Workplace breastfeeding supports, such as designated pumping breaks and private space, are particularly critical for both maternal and infant health. Unfortunately, while employers are required to provide pumping breaks and break time for some workers, a gap in the law has caused millions of overtime exempt employees to fall through the cracks. Furthermore, even covered workers have limited avenues to ensure their employers provide pumping breaks and a private space.

I think we can all agree that this is unacceptable. There is no question that our country is facing a maternal and infant health crisis. There is no question that our mothers and infants are suffering preventable tragedies that rarely occur in other developed nations. The only question is whether we will come together and fulfill our responsibility to find solutions and take action.

Thank you, again, to our witnesses for joining us today.