



The Honorable Joe Barton  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy & Commerce  
2322-A Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nathan Deal  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Health  
2322-A Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Barton and Ranking Member Deal:

On behalf of Trust for America's Health (TFAH), a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority, I would like to express our strong support for passage of the Healthy Start Reauthorization Act (S. 1760).

Our issue brief "Healthy Women, Healthy Babies" (copy enclosed), finds that after 40 years of improvements, infant mortality rates in the U.S. have stalled. Increasing evidence is showing that how healthy a woman is even *before* she becomes pregnant has a great impact on the health of the baby and whether there is an increased risk for infant death or birth defects. In fact, prematurity and low-birthweight rates are associated with health issues in the mother, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or obesity. Doctors fear that infant mortality rates may start to move in the wrong direction because the health of childbearing-aged women is starting to get worse, and it is getting worse more rapidly among low-income women. With that in mind, it is important to continue to invest in prenatal and preconception health programs like the Healthy Start Program.

As you know, Healthy Start projects operate in rural and urban communities where the infant mortality rate is above 150 percent of the national average. The Healthy Start Program promotes healthy women and healthy babies by increasing access to and use of health services for women and their families. Healthy Start projects ensure that mothers and infants have preventive and primary health care. A core program goal of the Healthy Start Program is to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in access to and use of health services. This goal is particularly important given that African American babies are dying at twice the rate of their white counterparts in the first year of life.

We must maintain our commitment to reducing infant mortality rates in this nation. To that end, we are pleased that the Senate has passed the Healthy Start Reauthorization Act by unanimous consent. We urge lawmakers in the House of Representatives to pass an identical version so that this vital legislation will be enacted promptly. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey Levi".

Jeffrey Levi, PhD  
Executive Director