

# Efforts to Reduce Infant Mortality Rates in the United States Championed by House Democrats

Darby O'Donnell, JD,  
Alliance for Patient Access (AfPA) Government Affairs Team

*The Alliance for Patient Access ([allianceforpatientaccess.org](http://allianceforpatientaccess.org)), founded in 2006, is a national network of physicians dedicated to ensuring patient access to approved therapies and appropriate clinical care. AfPA accomplishes this mission by recruiting, training and mobilizing policy-minded physicians to be effective advocates for patient access. AfPA is organized as a non-profit 501(c)(4) corporation and headed by an independent board of directors. Its physician leadership is supported by policy advocacy management and public affairs consultants. In 2012, AfPA established the Institute for Patient Access (IfPA), a related 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation. In keeping with its mission to promote a better understanding of the benefits of the physician-patient relationship in the provision of quality healthcare, IfPA sponsors policy research and educational programming.*



Over 23,000 infants died in the United States in 2016. Members of Congress are paying attention.

In August 2018, Congressman Steve Cohen (D-TN) hosted a symposium on infant and maternal mortality at Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, TN, in his home district. According to a press release, "The event focused on the needs of mothers in Memphis, the barriers to improving maternal health care, and reducing infant mortality and resources available in Shelby County, including free car seats for those who need them."

The meeting lead Congressman Cohen to introduce the NEWBORN (*Nationally Enhancing the Wellbeing of Babies through Outreach and Research Now*) Act (H.R. 117) on January 3, 2019. (1)

The legislation focuses on targeting areas of the country with high rates of infant mortality and providing federal support through pilot programs to those high-risk areas.

In a "Dear Colleague" asking Members of Congress to consider cosponsorship of the bill, Congressman Cohen writes, "A child is 76 percent more likely to die before their first birthday in America than in 19 other wealthy nations, including Australia, Canada,

France, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom."

The NEWBORN Act would help address the problem of infant mortality through the awarding of grants to infant mortality pilot programs that seek to address one or more of the top five reasons for infant mortality: birth defects, preterm birth and low birth weight, sudden infant death syndrome, maternal pregnancy complications, and/or injuries to the infant.

***"The NEWBORN Act would help address the problem of infant mortality through the awarding of grants to infant mortality pilot programs that seek to address one or more of the top five reasons for infant mortality: birth defects, preterm birth and low birth weight, sudden infant death syndrome, maternal pregnancy complications, and/or injuries to the infant."***

Programs may use such funds for counseling on infant care, feeding, and parenting. Also, the funds are eligible for delivery of services to aid in postpartum care and prevention of premature delivery. Smoking cessation, drug treatment programs, nutrition, and physical activity, domestic violence programs, and other social and psychological services are listed as eligible uses of the federal funding too.

After one year, each program is required to submit a report to delineate methodology of the program and outcomes associated with the program.

Currently, the bill has 46 cosponsors.

Outside of Congress, [MomsRising](http://MomsRising.org) is an organization that endorses the legislation. The background of the organization is listed on their website as: "unified by a mission of increasing family economic security, decreasing discrimination, and building a nation where both businesses and families can thrive." The [MomsRising](http://MomsRising.org) team covers all 50 states. (2)

**Readers can also follow**

**NEONATOLOGY TODAY**

**via our Twitter Feed**

**@NEOTODAY**

---

***“We must do more to make sure that women have the resources they need to deliver healthy babies – and that starts by improving access to health clinics and recruiting the best and brightest medical students to be inner city doctors. At the same time, we need a much more expanded outreach, education, and research program, and the NEWBORN Act will lay the foundation for that effort.”***

---

This is not the first time Congressman Cohen has introduced similar legislation to address infant mortality. Over the last decade in Congress, Steve Cohen has introduced multiple measures to decrease infant mortality rates and to focus on prenatal care for at-risk mothers. Nearly a decade ago, the Congressman remarked:

“We must do more to make sure that women have the resources they need to deliver healthy babies – and that starts by improving access to health clinics and recruiting the best and brightest medical students to be inner city doctors. At the same time, we need a much more expanded outreach, education, and research program, and the NEWBORN Act will lay the foundation for that effort.”

The bill, H.R. 117, was referred to the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health where it now rests.

**References:**

1. <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr117/text>
2. <https://www.momsrising.org/>

*The author has not indicated any disclosures.*

**NT**

**Corresponding Author**



Darby O'Donnell, JD  
Alliance for Patient Access (AfPA) Government Affairs Team  
1275 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Suite 1100A Washington, DC  
20004-2417  
202-499-4114  
[info@allianceforpatientaccess.org](mailto:info@allianceforpatientaccess.org)