

# *Maternal and Child Health Coalition*

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October 18, 2018

The Honorable LaToya Cantrell and Members of the New Orleans City Council:

We are the Maternal and Child Health Coalition, a group of individuals and community organizations dedicated to advocating for improved health services for women and children in New Orleans. Due to the dire statistics concerning birth outcomes, particularly for women of color, in our community, we are requesting that the City Council and Mayor's Office re-establish an office of maternal and child health within city government to monitor this crisis and implement interventions to improve how women give birth in this city.

The Mary Amelia Douglas-Whited Community Women's Health Education Center (MAC) at Tulane University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine reports that:

- Louisiana is second highest among all U.S. states for rates of low birth weight and preterm births, conditions that increase risk for neonatal morbidity and long-term deficits in growth and development.
- Black women in New Orleans are twice as likely to have a low birth weight infant and compared to White women and about 1.5 times as likely to give birth preterm.
- Louisiana has the fourth highest infant mortality rate in the United States and in New Orleans; the Black infant mortality rate is **three times** higher than the white infant mortality rate.

District level statistics reaffirm these alarming trends. In every district in Orleans parish, the percentage of babies born low birth weight or preterm exceeds the national averages (8.2% and 9.9%, respectively):

## **Low birth weight**

District A=9.7%, +1.5% the national average

District B=12.0%, +3.8%

District C=12.2%, +4%

District D=13.6%, +5.4%

District E=13.5%, +5.3%

## **Preterm birth**

District A=10.3%, +0.4% the national average

District B=12.0%, +2.1%

District C=11.3%, +1.4%

District D=12.0%, +2.1%

District E=13.7%, +3.8%

More information can be found in their full report, "The Health of Women & Girls in Louisiana: Racial Disparities in Birth Outcomes."

Given the importance of this health crisis, we are asking the City of New Orleans to re-establish an office of maternal and child health with a director and the resources to stem this tide. This office would be charged with monitoring birth outcomes in hospitals within Orleans Parish documenting cesarean rates, neonatal health, and maternal morbidity rates. This office would

also have a staff capable of conducting educational campaigns for both families and health care providers supporting all stages of pregnancy to ensure women and children's health. Further, the office would identify the factors associated with maternal, fetal, and infant deaths; determine the systemic nature of these deaths that require change; develop recommendations for changes; and assist in the implementation of change. While MAC's report indicates many possible interventions, we believe this is a critical first step in addressing these alarming statistics – a step that complements many of the actions you are undertaking to address public safety, poverty, and systemic racism – including the establishment of a Youth and Families Committee.

Given New Orleans' participation in the Bloomberg What Works Cities initiative and the creation of the DataDriven.nola.gov website, the establishment of a department of maternal and child health will further our efforts toward transparent and accessible public data. By collecting this data, we will be better able to identify the most innovative and successful interventions to improve birth outcomes in our city.

As public servants, you have the power to create and support this office that will make a significant impact on maternal and child health. According to the John Hopkins Women's and Children's Health Policy Center, cities like Nashville, Tennessee, that have programs similar to what we are proposing are “more likely to have data assessment and analysis, client services and access, quality improvement for systems of care, partnerships and collaboration, population advocacy and policy development, and have seen enhancements of the health workforce.”

While our coalition members have the specific mission to support mothers and children, other community organizations join with us in this call to action and have signed below to demonstrate their support for this request.

We cannot have an equitable and just community without healthy women and children. We cannot have a thriving economy without healthy women and children. We must act now to address this problem. We ask you to join us in the fight for healthy births in New Orleans.

Sincerely,

Members of the Maternal and Child Health Coalition

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Supporting Organizations

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