

SENATE LETTER

Support Robust Funding for Maternal and Child Health, including Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and Nutrition in Global Health

Please join Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Chris Coons (D-DE) in the call for robust funding for Maternal and Child Health, including Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and Nutrition in Global Health in fiscal year 2018. For information, or to sign onto the letter, please contact Mikhaila_Fogel@collins.senate.gov in Senator Collins' office or Jacqueline_Thomas@coons.senate.gov in Senator Coons' office.

Dear Chairman Graham and Ranking Member Leahy:

Thank you for your commitment to fiscal responsibility and to ensuring that despite a challenging budget environment, our nation's priorities are addressed. We share your interest in preserving effective, evidence-based, and sustainable poverty-focused foreign assistance that saves lives and creates economic stability in developing countries. We also appreciate the leadership you took last year to ensure strong funding for Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and Nutrition programs.

As you begin to consider the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 2018, **we urge you to support robust funding for MCH – including for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and for Nutrition in Global Health.**

These investments in MCH and Nutrition are the foundation for the U.S. goal of ending preventable child and maternal deaths within a generation. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has developed benchmark targets for that goal and an evidence-based roadmap to save an additional 15 million child lives and 600,000 women's lives by the year 2020. These achievable, bold goals can be reached with Congressional support for child survival and nutrition programs.

In close collaboration with partner countries and public-private partnerships like Gavi, we are seeing the lives of children saved as a result of U.S. assistance. Since 1990, the annual number of under-five deaths among children has drastically fallen from 12.6 million to 5.9 million in 2015.

More work remains to be done to meet the goal of ending preventable child and maternal deaths within a generation. Each day, approximately 800 women die from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. More than 16,000 children under age five die of preventable and treatable conditions such as prematurity, pneumonia and diarrhea. Malnutrition is the underlying cause in 45 percent of those deaths. According to the World Health Organization, three quarters of all newborn deaths occur in the first week of life. Moreover, when a mother dies, her children are less likely to go to school, get immunized, and have access to good nutrition, and they are up to ten times more likely to die in childhood than children with mothers.

Investments in MCH and Nutrition programs allow for the delivery of proven, low-cost services for newborns, children, and mothers throughout the developing world. These life-saving interventions include access to skilled birth attendants and emergency obstetric care; training for frontline health workers; clean water, sanitation, and hygiene; health commodities; and research and development.

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These accounts also support global polio eradication and measles elimination efforts along with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, which provides new and underutilized vaccines to developing countries. Since 2000, Gavi has contributed to the immunization of nearly 580 million children, which has resulted in 8 million deaths averted. Our investments in Gavi provide an increasing return on investment. In the last strategic period, seven dollars were contributed from other countries or donors for every dollar provided by the United States. Additionally, the nutrition-specific programs for women and children are critical, especially in the 1,000 days between pregnancy and a child's second birthday. These programs can make a tremendous impact on children's ability to learn and later secure employment and provide for their families as adults.

Funding for maternal and child health is among the most cost-effective, life-saving investments the U.S. can make. We applaud your leadership and urge you to continue strong support for these programs, and we look forward to working with you to help the United States maintain its leadership in this global effort.

Sincerely,

Senator SUSAN COLLINS

Senator CHRIS COONS