

Congress Should Come Together to Help Reach Every Mother and Child

As presidential candidates bemoan a broken political system and pundits point fingers, members of Congress from both parties have quietly come together in support of one issue that everyone can get behind: the health of mothers and children worldwide.

For too many moms, the hope and opportunity of motherhood is cut short, with eleven children under age five still dying every minute — mostly from treatable causes like diarrhea and pneumonia. This year, Congress can do something about it.

More than 140 legislators — Republicans and Democrats alike — have signed on to a bill that has the potential to do something truly remarkable: help pave the way for the *end* of preventable child and maternal deaths by 2035. It's now time for Congress to turn that bipartisan support into bipartisan action.

The House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations should waste no time in taking up the [Reach Every Mother and Child Act of 2015](#) (S.1911 and H.R. 3706) so this legislation can make its way into law.

The world has made incredible progress on this issue over the last 25 years. With the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and its global partners, the number of children under the age of 5 dying annually has fallen at an astonishing rate, from 12.7 million in 1990 to [5.9 million today](#). But there's still a long way to go, and the Reach Act will make sure this country does its part to help get there.

This legislation will enshrine important reforms into law, better positioning [USAID](#), our country's main international development agency, to support countries to save more lives. The Reach Act focuses on what we know works, including quality prenatal care, management of labor and delivery, and basic treatments necessary for child health.

The [Senate bill](#) is led by Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Chris Coons (D-DE), and the [House bill](#) is led by Representatives Dave Reichert (R-WA), Betty McCollum (D-MN), Barbara Lee (D-CA), and Michael McCaul (R-TX).

Where a baby is born should not determine how long she lives. With elections around the corner, this is Congress' chance to show they can come together on the issues that matter most. It's time to take up this common sense, cost-effective, and lifesaving bill.

Creating a More Efficient Approach

Working with its partners in lower-income countries, USAID has long been at the forefront of helping stop child and maternal deaths.

In 2012, the United States co-hosted the [Child Survival Call to Action](#), which forged a global consensus that we can end preventable child deaths by 2035.

However, a 2014 report from the ACES Blue Ribbon Panel, a group of high-level business and development experts, identified a series of specific budget and management challenges impeding faster progress. These include a highly decentralized planning and decision-making process, a lack of flexibility, and fragmented data collection that makes it difficult to measure progress.

Last year, USAID released a [report charting its own progress](#) on the “Call to Action,” and outlined plans to accelerate progress. USAID has already implemented a number of the panel’s [suggested reforms](#). This includes creating clear benchmarks for success, appointing a coordinator to manage the entire strategy, and realigning funds to save more lives even without spending additional money. This is major progress, but will not be enough to achieve the ultimate goal of ending preventable child and maternal deaths.

What Will This Legislation Do?

The Reach Act will hold USAID accountable for sticking to its promises. Without requiring additional funding, it will ensure USAID:

- Develops a U.S. Government strategy to help end preventable child and maternal deaths with ambitious, clear, and measurable goals;
- Increases accountability and transparency at all levels;
- Focuses on the poorest and most vulnerable populations, and recognizes the unique needs within different countries and communities;
- Scales up what’s proven to work and save the most lives, while reporting against clear targets;
- Codifies a Child and Maternal Survival Coordinator responsible for oversight;
- Creates new, innovative funding sources to complement U.S. investment; and
- Stretches every dollar further to save the most lives.

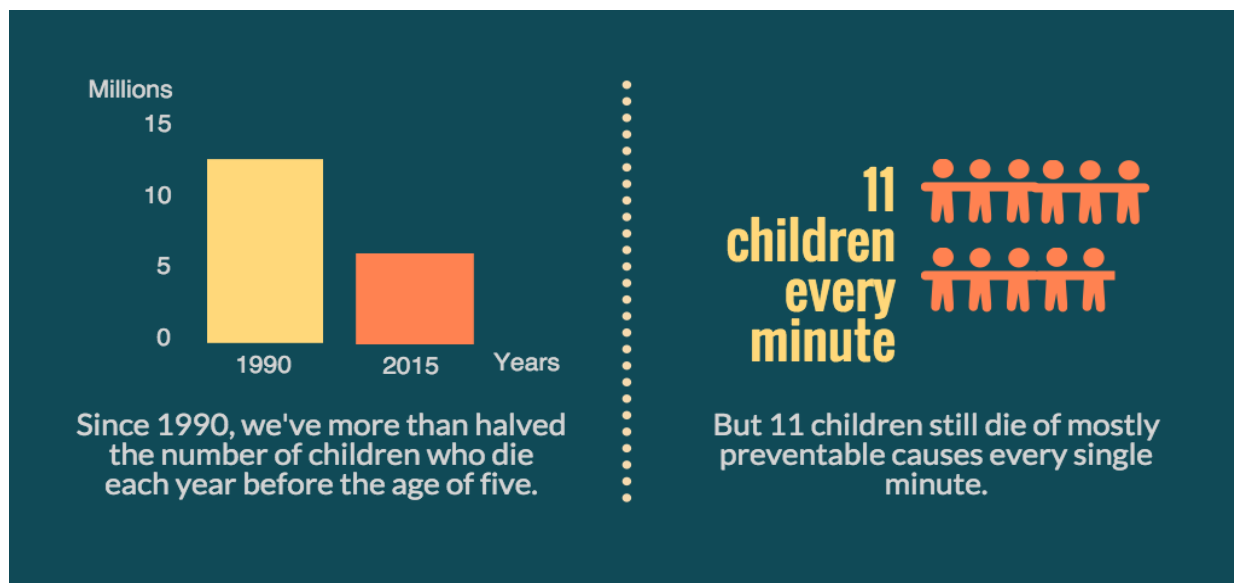
This legislation will maximize our investments, with returns measured in lives saved and healthy, prosperous communities. If the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations work quickly to take up this bill, Congress can help make sure that every single child in the world — regardless of where they are born — has a chance to not only survive, but thrive.

Congress Should Act Now

In describing the bipartisan appeal of the Reach Act on the Senate floor, [Senator Collins](#) said, “It should bring people together across party lines, and I hope we will be able to get it signed into law this year.” [Senator Coons](#) invited his colleagues to “join both of us in ensuring American ingenuity and leadership can continue to save lives and to offer communities around our world a brighter future.”

For that to happen, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations need to act now and take up the Reach Act. [RESULTS](#) is joined by over 25 leading organizations in supporting the Reach Act, including the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), faith-based organizations like [World Vision](#), and humanitarian organizations like [CARE](#) and [Save the Children](#).

Every child deserves to celebrate her fifth birthday, to experience her first day of school, and to eventually pursue her own hopes and dreams. Every mother should see her child reach these milestones. This year, Congress has a chance to pass legislation that will help make sure they can. **It’s hard to imagine a more powerful legacy.**



Learn more about child survival with UNICEF’s [interactive dashboard](#).

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