



Giving Children Everywhere the Chance to Thrive

September 9, 2015

By Aldwyn Hamilton

This summer, I traveled to Delaware's beaches with my nearly 3-year-old son to spend time with friends who also have children. We talked about how as parents, we face both wonderful and challenging times. The exciting milestones like birthdays, first words and starting school seem to go hand-in-hand with panicked hospital visits, stubborn viruses that won't go away and other ailments that seem to come out of nowhere (like vertigo for a friend's daughter!). Those emergency hospital visits are some of the hardest experiences to go through as a parent, but ultimately our children received the care they needed and are thriving today.

After growing up in Delaware and graduating from the University of Delaware, I worked in different countries for organizations addressing hunger and poverty. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, I saw first-hand how malnutrition attacks children's growing bodies. In addition to its visible effects, malnutrition weakens their systems so greatly that other illnesses — like the flu or even measles — grow and fester inside their tiny bodies but don't present outward symptoms until the malnutrition itself is treated. Seeing these children arrive at the malnutrition treatment centers was always the saddest day of the week for me, but I don't think I ever understood then just how excruciating it was for the mothers accompanying them.

Today as a mother, when my child is so sick that we have to go to the hospital, I feel worried, a bit desperate, and often sick myself. But my child always receives the treatment he needs to recover and is thriving. My son will celebrate his 3rd birthday next week and also start his first year of "real school." Meanwhile, each year 6.3 million children still die of mainly preventable and treatable causes before they reach their fifth birthday. Additionally, 289,000 women die from pregnancy-related complications yearly.

Now that I'm back in the United States with my family, I want to do all that I can so that all mothers everywhere can see their children reach their 3rd, 4th, and 5th birthdays, attend their first day of school and eventually pursue their own hopes and dreams.

I am thrilled that Senator Chris Coons of Delaware is co-leading the new bipartisan Reach Every Mother and Child Act of 2015. This bill aims to end preventable child and maternal deaths by 2035 by scaling up simple treatments that have been proven to work. It will also enshrine reforms that will make USAID, our main development agency, more effective and efficient. As a mother, and native Delawarean, I'm grateful to Chris Coons for this initiative, and hope that Delaware's Senator Tom Carper and Congressman John Carney will support this bill as well.

Like all mothers, I try to give my son the best, and I want him to grow up healthy, happy and strong. As all of our kids finish their summers and begin a new school year, let's all thank Chris Coons for making children's and mothers' lives a top priority, and urge other lawmakers to follow suit.