

Hope for the Holidays: A Healthy Start to Life for Every Child, Everywhere

Where a baby is born should not determine how long she lives. Congress has an unprecedented opportunity this holiday season to make sure that it doesn't.

During the holidays, we savor the chance to spend quality time with our families. But unfortunately, many children around the world don't have this same chance. In developing countries, millions of kids die before their fifth birthday simply because they don't have access to basic medical care.

Unlike many of the world's problems, this is one that we have the power to solve. And we've made some incredible progress. 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 12.6 million in 1990 to 5.9 million today.

And now, for the first time in history, experts and scientists agree that it's possible to stop these avoidable deaths once and for all. But with eleven children still dying [every minute](#) — mostly from treatable causes like diarrhea and pneumonia — much work remains.

In 2014, an external panel found that USAID, [our country's main international development agency](#), was not yet on track to meet its ambitious goal of ending preventable child and maternal deaths by 2035. But now the new, bipartisan **Reach Every Mother and Child Act of 2015 (S.1911 and H.R. 3706)** will enshrine important reforms into law, better positioning USAID to support countries to save more lives. The legislation 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).

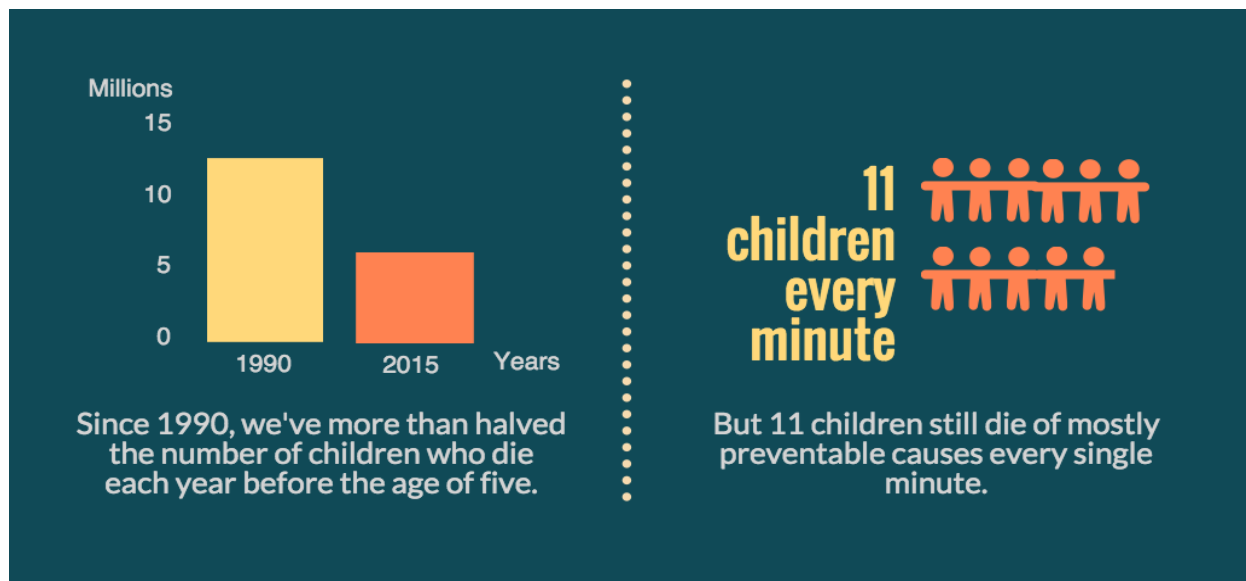
Lawmakers should seize this incredible opportunity and pass this common sense, cost-effective and — most importantly — lifesaving legislation.

Creating a More Efficient Approach

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

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.¹

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 \$2.9 billion in funds to save 500,000 additional lives by the end of 2015 alone. 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 end preventable child and maternal deaths with ambitious, clear, and measurable goals;

¹ Blue Ribbon Advisory Panel Report on USAID, June 2014

- 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 they work quickly to pass this bill, Congress can make sure that every single child in the world — regardless of where they are born — has a chance to not only survive, but thrive. **It's hard to imagine a more powerful legacy.**

Congress Should Act Now

In 2012, the United States hosted the [Child Survival Call to Action](#) which forged a global consensus that we can end preventable child deaths by 2035. Last year, USAID released a [report charting its own progress](#) on the “Call to Action,” and outlined plans to accelerate progress. By passing the Reach Act, Congress now has the opportunity to ensure this momentum continues beyond the current Administration.

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.”

Swift passage will require additional support. [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 in the world 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. Congress has a chance to ring in 2016 by passing legislation that will help make sure they can.