

We All Agree on Supporting Families

The election season seems to highlight our differences, at least when it comes to political parties. The media is filled with rancorous political statements, and people like to say that we are “a deeply divided nation.” But the truth is, we share values on many things—including providing health, safety, and opportunity to children and families. We work together creating systems that support our families, and we pull together when people are in trouble. And though the news hasn’t reported on it, Congress is working together to support children and families through the Reach Every Mother and Child Act (H.R. 3706, S. 1911). The goal of the legislation is to end unnecessary maternal and child deaths by 2035. Over 200 representatives of both parties have cosponsored the bill in the House, and over one-quarter of the Senate. There have been over 9000 bills introduced in the House during the current congressional cycle, and only 0.6% of them have 200 or more cosponsors. So this bill is special. And if Congress can persist and pass it, the Reach Act could change everything for families.

Creating a More Efficient Approach

Working with its partners in lower-income countries, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) has long been at the forefront of reducing child and maternal deaths, helping drive down preventable deaths for kids under age 5 from 12.7 million in 1990 to 5.9 million today.

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 the Reach Act 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 is 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 healthier, more prosperous communities. If the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and the 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 survive and thrive.

Call on Your Legislator to Advance the Reach Act

1. **Organize a letter-writing meeting:** 1) tell attendees why this is important to you, 2) share a story or video, 3) read the Action Sheet together, 4) have everyone write letters to your reps. and senator using the sample below, 5) read some of the letters out loud to inspire.
2. **Find a town hall meeting before the elections** or set up a face-to-face meeting where you can hand deliver your letters and make your request.
3. **Tell your members of Congress** about the opportunity to secure a healthy, bright future for every child and **urge them to ask to the Foreign Affairs (House) and Foreign Relations (Senate) Committee leadership to move the Reach Act this year.**

<u>E</u>ngage	When we were born, our moms made a promise to protect and nurture us so that we could reach our full potential.
<u>P</u>roblem	But no matter how hard some mothers try, they don't have the resources to ensure that their children get what they need to grow, survive, and thrive. Every minute, 11 children under age five die of unnecessary causes around the world. The heartbreak experienced by so many mothers is unfair and unimaginable.
<u>I</u>nform about the solution	But Congress has come together around moms and kids through the Reach Every Mother and Child Act (H.R. 3706 and S. 1911). Over 227 legislators, Republicans and Democrats, have cosponsored the Reach Act in an effort to improve the effectiveness of our maternal and child health work. The goal is to eventually end unnecessary deaths of moms and kids by 2035.
<u>C</u>all to action!	I writing to ask that the representative/senator speak to the leadership of the House Foreign Affairs and Senator Foreign Relations Committees to move the Reach Act this year. There is no better way to honor children – and mothers – around the world. Can you get back to me on your plans to make this request?