



Rural MOMS Act has bipartisan support

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Representative Xochitl Torres Small introduced the Rural MOMS Act of 2019, H.R. 4243 on Sept. 9, alongside Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., Rep. Abby Finkenauer, D-Iowa, Rep. Bob Latta, R-Ohio, Assistant Speaker Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., and Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., to improve healthcare access for new and expecting mothers in rural communities across the country. This bipartisan bill will make important strides toward addressing rural maternal mortality and morbidity rates nationwide by expanding convenient and consistent access to healthcare services for pregnant women and new mothers in remote areas.

The United States has some of the [highest maternal mortality rates in the developed world](#), with pregnant women and new mothers in rural areas, like New Mexico's Second Congressional District, facing significantly higher chances of dying from causes related to pregnant or childbirth compared to their urban counterparts.

[According to 2015 data from the Centers for Disease](#)

control, the maternal mortality rate in large central metropolitan areas was 18.2 per 100,000 live births, when compared to 29.4 per 100,000 live births in the most rural areas.

"One issue I hear about any time I am home in New Mexico is the challenge rural residents face due to a lack of accessible healthcare providers, leading many to forego necessary care or to stretch their budgets to attend doctors' appointments hours away," Small said. "For pregnant women in rural districts like New Mexico's Second District, they often have to spend hours on the road and cross state lines to attend the necessary prenatal appointments."

Rep. Torres Small leads legislation to help new mothers in rural America

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Expectant mothers should have the peace of mind that no matter where they choose to start a family, they will have access to the resources they need to bring healthy babies into the world. My bill is a welcome step in making that a reality by expanding telehealth access and bringing additional OB/GYNs directly to rural communities like the ones I represent,” Small said.

“Rural residents and minorities, including Native American women, have an alarmingly high maternal mortality rate. As I travel across central Washington, I hear how rural hospitals and healthcare providers are struggling to provide obstetric services and maternal care,” Newhouse stated. “By creating rural obstetric networks and new training for health professionals, we can empower our maternal health systems to adapt to best meet the needs of these communities. The Rural MOMs Act will expand data collection and telehealth programs for rural providers to help deliver quality care and improve outcomes for expecting mothers and families in central Wash. and those in rural areas across the nation.”

Finkenauer said, “I want to make sure we’re doing everything we can to help Iowa moms get the health care they need. In Congress, I’ve fought for legislation to keep our hospitals open and physicians serving patients. This bill would help ensure moms aren’t driving hours just to get the care that they and their babies need.”

“The rising number of women dying due to pregnancy-related complications is alarming and heartbreaking - and largely preventable. In rural areas, like many parts of my district, it can be difficult for women to access obstetric services they need before and after giving birth. With this important legislation, we’re utilizing telehealth, training, and reporting to better understand the root causes and help bring medical care to women when they need it most,” Latta added.

“Mothers in rural communities throughout New Mexico lack access to hospitals with labor and birthing services - and this disparity can lead to maternal morbidity and mortality. I’m proud to partner with Cong. Torres Small to ensure access to essential health needs and address the root causes of morbidity and mortality. This legislation is critical progress in ensuring every New Mexican has access to quality, affordable health care,” Luján said.

The Rural MOMS Act will:

Create Rural Maternal and Obstetric Care Data improvements by requiring the Centers for

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Disease Control to coordinate efforts around maternal mortality and morbidity, to report on women's health conditions according to sociocultural and geographic contexts, and to emphasize research on pregnancy-related deaths.

Award Rural Obstetric Network Grants to assist in the creation of regional innovation networks to address maternal mortality morbidity rates as well as birth outcomes.

Expand Existing Federal Telehealth Grant Programs to include birth and postnatal services as part of telehealth networks, and utilize federal funding for the cost of ultrasound machines, fetal monitoring equipment, and other pregnancy-related technology by expanding the Federal Telehealth Grant Programs.

Launch a Rural Maternal and Obstetric Care Training Demonstration for family medicine physicians, obstetricians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, midwives, doulas, and other medical professionals to provide maternal care services in rural community-based settings.

Report on Maternal Care in Rural Areas to identify the locations of gaps in maternity care, recommendations to standardize data collection on maternal mortality and morbidity, and activities to improve maternal care in rural areas.