



Dear Senator,

Each year, 12 percent of babies are born too early, and eight percent are born with low birth-weight, which puts them at higher risk for infant death and developmental disabilities. In addition, approximately 30 percent of women who give birth have some form of pregnancy complication. Enclosed is a copy of a new report, *Healthy Women, Healthy Babies*, produced by Trust for America's Health (TFAH). The report finds that many infant health problems are related to health issues in the mother, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or obesity.

Due to poor maternal and infant health, in 2005 the annual costs (medical, educational, and lost productivity) of preterm birth in the U.S. were at least \$26.2 billion, and the average first-year medical costs were about 10 times greater for preterm than for full term babies. In addition, significant health disparities exist among various ethnic and racial groups in the U.S., with African American babies dying at more than twice the rate of white infants. The report notes that many experts now believe that prenatal care, which usually begins during the first 3 months of a pregnancy, comes *too late* to prevent many serious maternal and child health problems. Instead of focusing solely on providing care during pregnancy, experts are calling for an approach that focuses on better primary health care for women in their childbearing years (15-44).

The report offers the following recommendations to improve preconception care:

- Fully implementing and enhancing Medicaid policies;
- Expanding programs such as the Healthy Start Infant Mortality Reduction Program, community health centers, Title X Family Planning and Title V Maternal and Child Health Block Grant, which provide primary care services to women of childbearing age; and
- Increasing research on preconception health and health care.

TFAH is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority. TFAH regularly issues reports highlighting public health issues and makes recommendations about how to improve our nation's health (reports may be found at www.healthyamericans.org). Please consider the organization as a key public health resource and, should you have any questions, or wish to be briefed on this or other TFAH reports, feel free to contact Richard Hamburg, Director of Government Relations, at (202) 223-9876, or rhamburg@tfah.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey Levi".

Jeffrey Levi, PhD
Executive Director