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Virtual Postcard Party Suggestion Sheet #217 May 14, 2021

# [NC single mom pens Mother’s Day plea to GOP legislative leaders](http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2021/05/08/nc-single-mom-pens-mothers-day-plea-to-the-gop-legislative-leaders/)

By [Tarsha Gunn](http://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/author/tgunn/) May 8, 2021

This Mother’s Day, new North Carolina mothers are receiving an unexpected gift thanks to President Biden’s American Rescue Plan (ARP), the federal relief bill that provides for an additional 10 months of postpartum healthcare for women who give birth. Currently, pregnant women covered by Medicaid get coverage for only 60 days after birth, even though most maternal deaths happen not in childbirth, but in the first year after birth.

The ARP relief package is opening up new opportunities for millions of people who’ve been struggling through the pandemic without healthcare, income and jobs to get the help they need to recover from COVID. In addition to extended unemployment benefits, more money for public education, free testing and vaccinations, and direct cash payments to 85% of households, the package also provides more funding for Medicaid services like coverage for the uninsured, expanded home and community-based care, and maternal health care.

This is all great news for new mothers who now receive Medicaid, but not for those who would also be eligible if our state had already expanded Medicaid. There is a proposed bill in the North Carolina Senate ([SB 530](https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookUp/2021/s530)) that would expand Medicaid coverage to new mothers, but only to new mothers, and only for one year. Limiting expanded eligibility just to them, and just for this limited period of time, rather than extending it permanently to the 500,000 North Carolinians who would benefit from a full expansion, would be misguided and wrong, especially in light of the generous financial incentives the ARP offers our state and others that have not yet expanded Medicaid.

We hear and read of talk at the General Assembly that Medicaid expansion could be a possibility this session. That would be great news for moms and their babies, particularly for low-income families and for women of color, who are more likely to have complications in pregnancy and childbirth than their white counterparts.  The United States has the [highest rate of maternal mortality](https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2020/nov/maternal-mortality-maternity-care-us-compared-10-countries) in the Western world.

Over half of pregnancy related deaths occur within the first year after birth. Black and Native American women are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than white women [according](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6835a3.htm?s_cid=mm6835a3_w) to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). [Black women](https://www.nbcnews.com/health/womens-health/u-s-finally-has-better-maternal-mortality-data-black-mothers-n1125896) have the highest rate of maternal mortality of any group.

As a single mother who has chronic congestive heart failure myself, along with other health issues, and two children diagnosed with mental and physical health challenges, I know that Medicaid has always been a critical program for moms and for their babies, and especially for Black mothers. My life, and my children’s, literally depends on my staying healthy. Medicaid has helped the three of us survive at times when we needed it, but there are so many who still need it and are denied.

Medicaid is particularly critical for moms and kids. Medicaid  is the leading payer of family planning services in the United States and finances the greatest number of births of any insurer. Fifty-four percent of births in North Carolina are financed through Medicaid.

But Medicaid coverage for pregnant people after birth has historically been limited to 60 days even though rates of maternal mortality have steadily increased over the past decade. North Carolina ranks 30th among state in maternal mortality. Lack of access to healthcare and to prenatal care, especially for Black women, is a prominent driver of this tragic statistic. Postpartum care for new moms is a good first step toward ensuring that more women have the healthcare they need to have healthy pregnancies and births.

[Research](https://www.cbpp.org/research/health/expanding-medicaid-for-parents-improves-coverage-and-health-for-both-parents-and) shows that when parents have consistent health coverage, overall health outcomes for the whole family improves and economic security increases. But social determinants of health like clean air and water, affordable housing, good paying jobs, paid leave and affordable childcare are also important factors in health outcomes. In addition to the relief package that has already passed and is being implemented, the upcoming federal stimulus packages are essential not just for substantive economic recovery, but for building back better in ways that actually address long-standing inequities and dated policies that have historically left women and people of color behind.

President Biden said in his first address to Congress, “Health care should be a right, not a privilege in America.” Every mom in America wants the best for her children and family. That goal is within reach but lawmakers at every level must take action that enables everyone to get affordable coverage no matter where they live, what they look like or their income. We will not build back better by leaving millions of people behind.

It’s past time North Carolina Republican legislators end their Medicaid expansion blockade.

Tarsha Gunn is a member of Action NC’s Race and Gender Equity Initiative (RAGE)

APPENDED: Portion of a rant on Mother’s Day followup

<https://www.emptywheel.net/2021/05/10/day-after-2nd-covid-mothers-day/>posted by Rayne

Mothers who survived this past year of pandemic have been under incredible pressure; [35 million moms](https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/families/cps-2020.html) with children at home [increased their unpaid care time by 57 million hours](https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54757) as childcare and home schooling fell to them disproportionately. They’re exhausted, tapped out of resources, and fed up with the unrelenting guilt trips about the glory of motherhood on top of the nasty demands from the business world which insists workers are slackers laying about, sucking down unemployment benefits.

Meanwhile the previous shortage of childcare has become catastrophic, in part because many moms who worked as daycare providers and grandmothers who may have provided care for free have gotten sick, developed long COVID, or died.

What daycare remains open is increasingly expensive — in 2019 the average cost for an infant and a preschool child was [$22,000 a year](https://info.childcareaware.org/hubfs/2019%20Price%20of%20Care%20State%20Sheets/Final-TheUSandtheHighPriceofChildCare-AnExaminationofaBrokenSystem.pdf) — and moms who earn minimum wage may not be able to afford care depending on whether they are eligible for any state or federal aid.

Hourly tipped workers whose workplaces have limited capacity due to COVID restrictions may not earn enough tips — they certainly can’t make enough on their base wages which in [18 states and Washington DC](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/state/minimum-wage/tipped) doesn’t reach $2.50 an hour.

What happens when an outbreak happens and schools need to rapidly change to remote learning? Moms drop everything and end up at home to care for their kids, needing to drop work hours and shifts or quit altogether. Far too many mothers can’t get paid time off let alone unpaid time off to address their children’s needs even when there isn’t a pandemic; it’s worse during COVID because there are so few alternatives to simply quitting when there’s no backup care provider.

If we truly want to do something meaningful and of real use for mothers in this country, we need to do more than send cards and flowers. We need to deliver for them the remaining 364 days a year.

Moms need:

– A living wage beginning with $15 an hour for all minimum wage workers;

– Health care for all, not just insurance for some;

– A comprehensive program helping to meet the needs of new parents, persons with serious personal or family health challenges, providing paid leave (see the [FAMILY Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/804));

– Establish a national paid sick days standard (see the [Healthy Families Act](https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-sick-days/the-healthy-families-act-fact-sheet.pdf));

– Establish a national childcare program to expand availability and at prices based on income, beginning with the [Child Care for Working Families Act](https://www.ffyf.org/child-care-for-working-families-act-introduced-in-congress/);

– Integrate the [Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act](https://www.wyden.senate.gov/news/press-releases/wyden-joins-warren-to-introduce-universal-child-care-and-early-learning-act-) into a national childcare program so that children do not have to be shuttled from daycare to preschool essential to preparation for K-12 education;

– Care for working mothers-to-be with passage of the [Pregnant Worker Fairness Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1065), which protects pregnant workers’ right to reasonable accommodation, prevents retaliation for requesting reasonable accommodation, and prevents pregnant women from being forced to take leave, paid or unpaid, if reasonable accommodation is available;

– Address the [massive economic losses sustained disproportionately by women](https://www.cnbc.com/2021/04/30/women-globally-lost-800-billion-dollars-in-income-due-to-covid-19.html) during the pandemic, a considerable percentage of which are mothers.

Both the Healthy Families Act and the FAMILY Act were introduced in 2019 but ended up shuttled off to die in committee. The FAMILY Act has been resubmitted and needs to passed if we are to successfully recover from this pandemic without further sacrifice on the part of mothers.

The Healthy Families Act does not appear to have been re-introduced yet under the 117th Congress (at least no bill comes up for this term under that name).

The Child Care for Working Families Act was re-introduced in April in both houses of Congress after failing to pass under the 116th Congress.

Senators Wyden and Warren introduced the Universal Child Care and Early Learning Act last month.

The Pregnant Worker Fairness Act has already been approved by the House Education and Labor Committee as of March 24; it has [wide, bipartisan support](https://twitter.com/RepJerryNadler/status/1364314556265345027) and needs to be passed ASAP before any more pregnant workers are forced out of their jobs without reasonable accommodation.

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You made your phone call to the mothers in your life yesterday to tell them you care. Now make the calls to your representatives in Congress to follow through and insist they take action to pass the legislation to help mothers and grandmothers, and mothers-to-be.

Don’t just talk, do the walk.

Congressional switchboard: (202) 224-3121 or use [Resist.bot](https://resist.bot/).