

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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January 30, 2025

Jennifer Shuford, MD, MPH
Commissioner of Public Health
Texas Department of State Health Services
1100 West 49th Street
Austin, TX 78756-3199

Dear Commissioner Shuford:

We write again to express our deep and continued concern regarding the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee's ("MMMRC") decision to forgo reviewing pregnancy-related deaths in defiance of Texas state law.¹ Texas has imposed some of the strictest abortion restrictions in the United States since the Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision in June 2022. In the wake of these restrictions, fewer and fewer Texas women can access emergency, life-saving reproductive health care services during their pregnancies and more reproductive care practitioners are exiting the state.² We wrote to you on December 19, 2024, expressing our concerns with MMMRC's decision not to review maternal deaths and requested a staff briefing. However, Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) failed to provide that briefing and failed to acknowledge receipt of our letter.³

We remain concerned that MMMRC has chosen to forgo reviewing maternal death data in the period after Texas imposed its abortion restrictions to suppress a possible correlation

¹ *Texas Committee Won't Examine Maternal Deaths in First Years After Abortion Ban*, Washington Post (Nov. 26, 2024) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2024/11/26/texas-committee-wont-examine-maternal-deaths-first-years-after-abortion-ban/).

² Manatt Health, *The Texas OB/GYN Physician Workforce Early Assessment of the Impact of Abortion Restrictions on the Workforce Pipeline* (Oct. 2024) (online at www.manatt.com/Manatt/media/Documents/Articles/FINAL-TX-OBGYN-Workforce-Study_2024-10_f.pdf); *Id.*

³ Letter from Ranking Member Jamie Raskin, Committee on Oversight and Accountability to Jennifer Shuford, Commissioner of Public Health, Texas Department of State Health Services (Dec. 19, 2024) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-oversight.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/2024-12-19.JBR%20Crockett%20Lee%20et.%20al%20to%20Shuford-TXDSHS%20re%20Texas%20Maternal%20Mortality.pdf>).

between abortion bans and maternal deaths.⁴ Despite progress the United States has made in reducing the overall prevalence of maternal deaths in the past decades, it is no secret that maternal deaths are increasing in states with abortion restrictions.⁵ In Texas, maternal deaths increased by 56% after the state enacted its abortion ban.⁶

As we noted in our previous letter, state and local MMMRCs are widely considered to be the gold standard for helping us understand the drivers of maternal mortality and pregnancy complications, as well as associated disparities in maternal health outcomes. As the first and largest state to implement a strict abortion ban following the *Dobbs* decision, Texas can offer extensive insight into the effect of abortion bans. Analyzing maternal mortality data and sharing these findings with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other states should be a top priority for MMMRC. Ignoring these deaths directly contradicts MMMRC's statutorily required mission of eliminating preventable maternal deaths in Texas.

More recently, Texas policymakers have sought to further restrict access to abortion care. For example, in January 2025, lawmakers in Texas introduced proposals that would classify abortion pills as "controlled substances"⁷ and mailing abortion medication without an in-state prescription as a "deceptive trade practice."⁸ If enacted, these measures would further curtail Texas women's access to emergency, life-saving reproductive health care services and exacerbate maternal mortality.

In December, we requested a staff level briefing to better understand MMMRC's decision to break with past precedent and not review all maternal deaths. Texas Department of State Health Services' failure to provide a staff briefing or acknowledge receipt of our letter is unacceptable. As women continue to die from preventable pregnancy-related conditions in Texas and across the entire country, the decision not to reply or engage with Committee Members and staff raises further concerns about the information DSHS might be suppressing. Maternal deaths remain a top issue for Committee Democrats, and we once again request that the Texas MMMRC provide a staff-level briefing to the Committee no later than February 12, 2025.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at

⁴ *Texas Committee Won't Examine Maternal Deaths in First Years After Abortion Ban*, Washington Post (Nov. 26, 2024) (online at www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2024/11/26/texas-committee-wont-examine-maternal-deaths-first-years-after-abortion-ban/).

⁵ *New Report Shows Worsening Health Outcomes for Women in States with Abortion Bans*, American Journal of Managed Care (July 18, 2024) (online at www.ajmc.com/view/new-report-shows-worsening-health-outcomes-for-women-in-states-with-abortion-bans).

⁶ *A dramatic rise in pregnant women dying in Texas after abortion ban*, NBC News (Sept. 21, 2024) (online at www.nbcnews.com/health/womens-health/texas-abortion-ban-deaths-pregnant-women-sb8-analysis-rcna171631).

⁷ HB 1339, 89th Reg. Sess. (Texas 2025) (online at <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=89R&Bill=HB1339>).

⁸ HB 1651, 89th Reg. Sess. (Texas 2025) (online at <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=89R&Bill=HB1651>).

“any time” under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

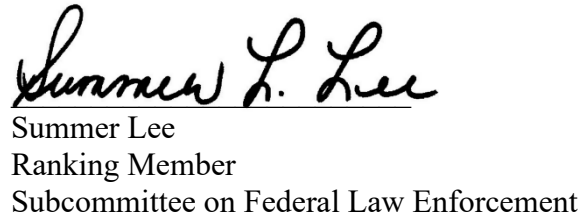
Sincerely,



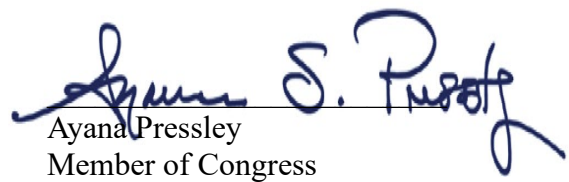
Gerald E. Connolly
Ranking Member



Jasmine Crockett
Vice Ranking Member



Summer Lee
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Federal Law Enforcement



Ayana Pressley
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable James Comer, Chairman
The Honorable Clay Higgins, Chairman, Subcommittee on Federal Law Enforcement