June 24, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), representing more than 60,000 physicians and partners dedicated to advancing women’s health, we urge you to take immediate and continued action to prioritize the health and safety of pregnant patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection. In response to new information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicating that pregnant individuals with COVID-19 are at increased risk of severe illness, it is critical that Congress ensure that this population is prioritized for the purposes of access to testing, participation in vaccine trials, and accurate and comprehensive data collection.

The CDC recently released new surveillance data indicating that pregnant individuals with COVID-19 are more likely to be hospitalized and are at increased risk for intensive care unit admission and receipt of mechanical ventilation than nonpregnant individuals. This new data is an important reminder that we are still in the midst of a pandemic and continue to learn about the virus and its disparate impact on certain populations. The data also reinforces ACOG’s concerns that the pandemic will negatively impact maternal health outcomes, potentially worsening the existing maternal mortality crisis. In addition, while data on racial and ethnic differences in disease severity in pregnant individuals is not available, considering the inequitable impact of the virus on communities of color, ACOG is concerned that pregnant people of color are also inequitably impacted.

In response to this new data, ACOG continues to urge you to prioritize the following recommendations for inclusion in any legislative package:

- **Prioritize maternity care and ensure physicians and patients have the equipment and testing they need to stay safe.** As we continue to learn more about the impact of the virus on pregnant patients, access to personal protective equipment (PPE) and rapid-response diagnostic testing is key. Our capacity to overcome this pandemic hinges on our ability to accurately identify and subsequently adjust clinical management of those testing positive for COVID-19. Increased access to rapid-response diagnostic testing in labor and delivery would help direct critical resources, including PPE, and also alleviate those ongoing shortages.
To preserve the health and safety of laboring patients and their obstetric care professionals, it is critical that labor and delivery units be considered high priority for the distribution of rapid-response diagnostic testing and PPE. The ability to test laboring patients is essential for the implementation of appropriate care plans that ensure the health and safety of women, their infants, and their clinical care team. While whether to test a patient remains a clinical decision, access to accurate and high-quality rapid-response diagnostic testing in labor and delivery units should be universal. As testing supplies continue to lag behind demand, and especially as more communities begin to resume components of daily life, prioritization decisions being made at the federal, state, local, and hospital levels should consider the needs of labor and delivery units. We urge Congress to continue leveraging all mechanisms at its disposal to increase the production and appropriate distribution of PPE and rapid-response diagnostic testing.

- Ensure that pregnant and breastfeeding people and communities of color are included in research and data collection. Our collective efforts to fully understand and effectively mitigate the impact of COVID-19 rely on quality, inclusive, and comprehensive data collection and research. We remain incredibly concerned by the lack of uniform and standardized collection and reporting of race and ethnicity data across states and urge Congress to use the authorities at its disposal to require collection and reporting of race and ethnicity data for all diagnostic tests, positive cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. It is critically important that pregnancy status be included as part of the demographic data collected and reported on COVID-19. Having this data is essential to establishing the evidence base to inform future policy to protect pregnant individuals. In addition, we are concerned that pregnant and lactating women, including women of color, continue to be largely excluded from clinical trials on a potential COVID-19 vaccine. We urge Congress to encourage safe inclusion of pregnant and lactating women, including women of color, in trials for vaccines and therapeutics to ensure these populations are not left behind in our search for ways to prevent and treat COVID-19.

Thank you for your prompt attention to these important issues. As you continue to navigate the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, please consider ACOG a trusted resource and authority on the clinical care and treatment of pregnant individuals. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please contact Rachel Tetlow, Federal Affairs Director, at rtetlow@acog.org.

Sincerely,

Maureen G. Phipps, MD, MPH, FACOG
Chief Executive Officer
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists