Dear Rep. Burgess and Rep. Capps:

On behalf of the Coalition for Quality Maternity Care (CQMC), a group of national professional, consumer, and human rights organizations that promote high-quality maternity care for all women and newborns, we write to strongly support the “Improving Access to Maternity Care Act of 2014,” (H.R.1209) which you introduced on March 3, 2015. The CQMC applauds this bipartisan effort to address the needs of pregnant women and their newborns.

This bill would establish a health professional shortage area designation for maternity care services, similar to shortage designations that exist for primary care, dental and mental health services. The goal of this legislation is to identify areas in the U.S. experiencing significant shortages of full scope maternity care professionals. Greater information on the shortages of maternity care providers that exist will enable Congress and the Administration to better address the needs of women and focus valuable resources to areas of significant need. We believe that expanding access to maternity care professionals in underserved areas can reduce overall maternity care costs in the U.S. by ensuring women have access to necessary prenatal care and delivery options.
In a report issued in June of 2013, the Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission (MACPAC) highlights that having coverage for maternity services does not guarantee access to care. Access to maternity care professionals is a significant issue in many areas of the country due to the changing demographics of maternity care providers, variation among practice environments, and restructuring, regionalization and closure of many maternity care units.

Using data from the Health Resource and Services Administration, Eugene Declercq, a professor in Boston University’s School of Public Health, has shown that in 2011, 56 percent of US counties had no certified nurse-midwives, 46 percent of counties had no OB/GYN and 40 percent of counties had neither a certified nurse-midwife nor OB/GYN to provide direct patient care. For millions of women, shortages of maternity care providers can result in long waiting times for appointments and long travel times to prenatal care and/or birthing sites. Maternity care providers have become particularly prone to workforce challenges due to concerns surrounding professional liability, unpredictable working hours, declining medical student interest, reductions in the numbers of residency programs, and increasing sub-specialization by graduating residents. These factors have contributed to inadequate access to maternal and reproductive care.

You may contact Patrick Cooney at (202) 347-0034 x101 or via email at Patrick@federalgrp.com if you have questions regarding this issue.

Sincerely,

American Association of Birth Centers
American College of Nurse-Midwives
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Centering Healthcare Institute
Lamaze International
March of Dimes
Midwives Alliance of North America
National Association of Certified Professional Midwives
National Women’s Health Network
U.S. Breastfeeding Committee