

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery**  
**of**  
**Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.**

***Hearing on “Enhancing Public Health: Legislation to Protect Children and Families”***

**October 20, 2021**

Today, the Committee continues our important, bipartisan work to protect children and families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested every aspect of family health and demonstrated how critical physical and social environmental factors are to health outcomes. There are also significant concerns that many children and families have gone without routine care during the pandemic. This is worrisome because this care is critical to promoting public health and identifying health conditions early. Unfortunately, it will be some time before we realize the full impact of the lapse in care.

Today, we are considering legislation that will tackle these challenges in multiple ways.

For example, the pandemic created obstacles to preventative care, including cancer screenings, which could have resulted in early forms of cancer going undetected. We will consider three bills that reauthorize or otherwise expand life-saving screening services for lung, prostate, and breast cancer. These are important bipartisan pieces of legislation that will help Americans access care and treatment when it is most effective.

The pandemic has also undoubtedly delayed care for children and introduced new challenges in the absence of childcare and in-person learning. Some studies suggest that nearly 30 percent of parents postponed or did not seek care for their children due to concerns about exposure to COVID-19. The impacts have been greater on lower income families who have been more likely to delay care or to simply go without care. Since the pandemic has had a disparate impact on lower income families, it is important that we act to reverse any harmful effect on the health and well-being of children.

Today we are considering multiple bills that seek to expand pediatric research and health care services. We will discuss H.R. 2161, the Children and Media Research Advancement Act, which will authorize the National Institutes of Health to expand research into the cognitive, physical, and social-emotional development effects of media on infants, children, and adolescents. This legislation is particularly important right now as the pandemic has resulted in children spending more time on electronics for learning and social engagement with friends.

We will also consider H.R. 5487, the Stillbirth Health Improvement and Education for Autumn Act. This bill would provide resources to state and federal health departments to

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improve data collection and increase education about stillbirths, which, tragically, affect an estimated 24,000 families nationwide each year.

These are just a few of the proposals we will consider, and we have an excellent panel of witnesses ready to discuss the full slate of bills. We will hear from medical experts in the fields of cancer, cardiology, and pediatrics.

We will also hear from two parents who will share the stories of their two daughters – Katherine Bensen and Gabriella Miller, who both lost their lives too soon to cancer. I look forward to hearing from Ellyn Miller who is also the President and Founder of the Smashing Walnuts Foundation, about the “Gabriella Miller Kids First Research Act.” And I would also like to thank our former colleague, Representative Nolan for coming to share his daughter Katherine’s story, and to discuss the “Katherine’s Law for Lung Cancer Early Detection and Survival Act.”

Finally, I’m pleased we were able to work with Ranking Members Rodgers and Guthrie on this hearing and on this bipartisan slate of bills that will improve the health of children and families all across the nation.

I look forward to moving these bills forward soon. Thank you.