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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 9, 2015

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Leading Midwifery Organization Testifies on Capitol Hill in Favor of Legislation to Address Maternity Care Provider Shortage

American College of Nurse-Midwives President Supports Giving Women in Underserved Areas Greater Access to Maternity Care

Silver Spring, MD – The American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) President Ginger Breedlove, CNM, PhD, FACNM today urged a House subcommittee to pass a bill that would identify areas of the country where women do not have access to qualified maternity care providers, including midwives and OB/GYNs.

The testimony before the US House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce's Subcommittee on Health was in support of "*Improving Access to Maternity Care Act of 2015*" (H.R.1209). The bill was introduced by Representatives Michael Burgess (R-TX) and Lois Capps (D-CA) in the House, and the companion bill in the Senate was introduced by Senators Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI).

This legislation 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. This designation would help to identify areas in the US that experience significant shortage to full scope maternity care professionals, including certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs).

"As midwives working to achieve optimal health for women throughout the U.S., we are thankful to Rep. Michael Burgess and Rep. Lois Capps for championing this important public health initiative, particularly for women in rural and urban areas experiencing shortages of qualified maternity care providers," Breedlove said. "The bill would enable Congress and the Administration to better assess the maternity care landscape in order to address the needs of women of childbearing age and allow appropriate resources to be focused on those needs."

Breedlove added that by expanding access to maternity care professionals in underserved areas, the U.S. can reduce overall maternity care costs by ensuring women have access to necessary prenatal care and delivery options. "ACNM hopes that Congress will pass this bill without delay," Breedlove added.

Rep. Burgess, M.D. said, "Ensuring access to maternity care for mothers and babies everywhere in the United States is a commonsense, bipartisan goal. No woman should have to sacrifice proper prenatal care due to a shortage of maternity care providers in her geographical vicinity. This bill, introduced with Representative Capps, will facilitate the collection of data necessary to place maternity care providers

serving in the National Health Service Corps where they are needed most to improve access to maternity care for both mothers and babies.”

“Access to quality maternity care is critically important for both the health of women and their future children,” Rep. Capps said. “That is why I am so proud to be working on this bipartisan legislation to help identify and fill the gaps in maternity care through the National Health Service Corps.”

The CDC reports that the rate of maternal mortality has more than doubled in the past few decades. Whereas 7.2 women died per 100,000 births in 1987, that number has increased to 17.8 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2009 and 2011 (700-800 women die each year). Other countries less developed than the U.S. have experienced a decline. Today, women giving birth in the U.S. are at a higher risk of dying than those giving birth in China or Saudi Arabia.

“This is a national tragedy that must be addressed,” Breedlove said. “While there are several causes, one solution is better access to maternity care providers, such as midwives, who can monitor a woman’s pregnancy and provide prenatal care, adequate postnatal care and promote a healthy transition to parenthood without complications.”

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For more information and a copy of Dr. Ginger Breedlove’s testimony, please contact ACNM Media Relations & Social Media Specialist Michele Lunsford at 240-485-1856 or mlunsford@acnm.org.

The American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) is the professional association that represents certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) and certified midwives (CMs) in the United States. ACNM promotes excellence in midwifery education, clinical practice, and research. With roots dating to 1929, our members are primary care providers for women throughout the lifespan, with a special emphasis on pregnancy, childbirth, and gynecologic and reproductive health. ACNM provides research, administers and promotes continuing education programs, establishes clinical practice standards, and creates liaisons with state and federal agencies and members of Congress to increase the visibility and recognition of midwifery care.

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