



For Immediate Release

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Mayor Rawlings-Blake and Nonprofit Leaders Launch Citywide Campaign to Reduce Baltimore's High Infant Mortality Rate

***"B'More for Healthy Babies" event showcases
first phase of major media campaign, focused on safe sleep***

BALTIMORE — Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake joined nonprofit and healthcare leaders today to launch B'more for Healthy Babies, a major citywide public health initiative to reduce the city's high rate of infant deaths and promote healthy families. B'more for Healthy Babies is a partnership between the Baltimore City Health Department, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield and the Family League of Baltimore City Inc. CareFirst has committed \$3 million to support the three-year initiative.

The initiative seeks to build widespread involvement in preventing infant deaths through education, community outreach, a media campaign and other means. The program's guiding mission is to ensure that all Baltimore babies are born at a healthy weight, at full-term, and ready to thrive in healthy families.

The mayor and others leading the campaign introduced the community to the first stage of the initiative, sharing media outreach materials focused on promoting safe infant-sleep practices.

"Losing even one infant to a preventable death is a tragedy, and I am so pleased that we are able to launch this important initiative," Mayor Rawlings-Blake said. "Last year 27 babies in Baltimore died while sleeping. Twenty-six of them were not put to sleep safely. These babies might still be living if they had been put to sleep alone, on their backs and in a crib. With the B'More for Healthy Babies initiative, we will be doing everything we can to educate families and the community about how to prevent these kinds of infant deaths."

"I join Governor Martin O'Malley in full support of Baltimore's comprehensive approach to ensuring all newborns have every chance for a healthy start in life," said John M. Colmers, Secretary of the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

"Reducing infant mortality by enveloping at-risk pregnancies in care and services is a

great challenge. That is why Governor O'Malley chose this issue as one of his top priorities and why we are here today as partners in transforming that challenge into an opportunity to thrive for every baby born in Baltimore.”

B'more for Healthy Babies was developed to address Baltimore City's high rate of infant deaths, among the worst in America. In 2009 alone, more than 120 infants in Baltimore under the age of one died, with many of the deaths being preventable. The city also has a high rate of babies born pre-term and underweight – key factors in infant mortality.

“Every infant death in Baltimore City is a harsh reminder that we should be doing more to help mothers receive the care they need to have healthy births and care for the fragile lives they take home,” said Chet Burrell, CareFirst President and CEO. “Our partnership with Mayor Rawlings-Blake, the City Health Department and the Family League is part of a concerted effort to remove the social and economic barriers now preventing mothers in need from the care and support services that can save their babies' lives.”

Today's event introduced samples of the initiative's first media campaign – on the topic of safe sleep for babies – including radio spots, bus posters, and bumper stickers, as well as an excerpt of an educational video on safe sleep. In coming months, the campaign will provide the full video to Baltimore hospitals to share with new mothers and other family members.

The video features the stories of three Baltimore mothers who lost a baby while sleeping and explores how they have to live with their loss. The courageous women are telling their stories to educate others and prevent more infant deaths.

The B'more for Healthy Babies initiative operates on four levels – improving policies and public systems, enhancing services for expecting mothers and families, building community involvement, and engaging families and individuals in healthier practices.

“Immediately reducing the number of infants dying from preventable deaths in Baltimore is a critical goal,” said Rafael Lopez, President and Chief Executive of the Family League. “But we're also trying to build community awareness of the issue and, ultimately, strengthen policies and public systems that will help educate families and protect infants for years to come.”

The initiative will work citywide but will focus especially on three selected communities – Patterson Park North and East, Upton/Druid Heights, and Greenmount East. Community-based organizations in those areas have received support from the Family League to offer innovative community-based activities and link service providers around the issue.

With a slogan of “Every Baby Counts on You,” the initiative seeks to engage all community members in preventing infant deaths, including parents, relatives, caregivers, medical professionals, social workers and others.

The Johns Hopkins Center for Communications Programs, working with Mission Media, has developed communications materials for the initiative and will evaluate its effectiveness. Agencies taking part include Baltimore HealthCare Access, Baltimore Mental Health Services, Baltimore Substance Abuse Systems, the Baltimore City Department of Social Services, and Baltimore City Public Schools,

“This is the kind of public-private partnership we need to address a major public health problem,” said Olivia Farrow, interim Health Commissioner. “We have all the right players working on this initiative and I know we will make a positive difference in the lives of Baltimore’s families.”

For more information, visit the Baltimore City Health Department’s Website: www.baltimorehealth.org/birthoutcomes.

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