

**CHAIRMAN FRANK PALLONE, JR. STATEMENT AT THE
HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING
“Prematurity and Infant Mortality: What happens when babies are
born too early?”**

May 12, 2010

“Good Afternoon. Today the Subcommittee will examine the causes and consequences of premature births and infant mortality. This is an important but complicated public health issue for which much is still unknown.

“According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), each year, more than a half million babies in the United States – or 1 in every 8 – are born prematurely. This statistic is up 20 percent from 1990, and we are just starting to see a decline. Despite the recent decrease, preterm birth remains a pressing health issue which deserves ample attention as it is the greatest risk factor for infant mortality and contributes to host of acute and chronic conditions.

“While much advanced research has been conducted and continues today, researchers are still trying to understand why preterm labor occurs. However, we do know that there are a set of factors that put women at higher risk of having a premature baby. Some known factors include: carrying more than one baby, having a previous preterm birth, high blood pressure and diabetes.

“In addition, we know that there are also external factors that occur either alone or in combination with other individual characteristics. These include age, race, poverty, marital status, stress, environmental chemicals and many others. I am interested to hear from our witnesses today how these factors intertwine and what we can do moving forward to limit their effects.

“While not directly linked to prematurity, I am particularly interested to hear today about the prevalence of stillbirths and Sudden Unexpected Infant Death (SUID) within the infant mortality rate in the United States.

“Like preterm birth, stillbirth has some risk factors and causes such as maternal medical conditions, fetal factors, umbilical cord problems and placental abnormalities. However, despite these known risk factors there is no known cause for as many as half of all stillbirths, leaving many parents without answers to the reasons for these deaths. No parent should have to endure the pain of losing a child, especially without knowing why that child was taken from them so soon.

“This is why I introduced the Stillbirth and SUID Prevention Education and Awareness Act which would improve data collection and education so we can better understand the cause of these deaths and help parents get the information and answers they need to prevent them.

“The bill will also fund investigations to finally provide some answers by creating a national registry to help researchers understand the scope and impact of these tragedies. By understanding the causes of death, we can prevent these tragedies in the future. We want every child to have the chance to grow up healthy.

“In my opinion, infant mortality is a public health problem that needs the attention of this Subcommittee, so I would like to thank all of our witnesses for being here today. I now recognize our Ranking Member, Mr. Shimkus for five minutes for the purpose of making an opening statement.”