

March 23, 2017

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education and
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cole and Ranking Member DeLauro:

As you prepare the fiscal year (FY) 2018 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, NAPHSIS—representing the 57 states and territories responsible for vital records—respectfully requests that you provide **\$5 million to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) to continue efforts to modernize the National Vital Statistics System**. This funding will address an urgent data quality and timeliness issue—the future of the State and Territorial Exchange of Vital Events or “STEVE” system, operated by NAPHSIS. STEVE facilitates the sharing of accurate, timely, and secure data for use in monitoring our nation’s health and reducing waste, fraud, and abuse in federal benefits programs.

As headlines demonstrate—from the unexpected rise in death rates among middle-aged, white Americans due to substance abuse and suicide, to impact of home births on infant mortality, to the rise in the age of first time mothers—vital records serve critical public health, civil registration, and administrative functions. In an example of effective federalism, the 50 states, five territories, District of Columbia and New York City legally responsible for vital records provide the federal government with data collected through birth and death records to compile national health statistics, facilitate secure Social Security number (SSN) issuance to newborns through the Enumeration at Birth (EAB) Program, and report individuals’ deaths.

Americans rarely live and die where they are born, so sharing of such information across state lines is essential for states to monitor disease prevalence, leading causes of death and preterm births; develop programs to improve public health; and evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions. Cross-jurisdictional sharing is also essential for reducing fraud that allows erroneous federal and state benefit payments to be made to deceased persons. STEVE is the cornerstone of data sharing, facilitating fast and secure transmission of complete vital records data across state lines and with other critical data partners, including NCHS. Without STEVE, jurisdictions’ ability to exchange data quickly and accurately declines significantly and the amount of time it would take a jurisdiction to compile complete data for its residents and to respond to the data needs of another state by sharing data for that state’s residents increases exponentially. For example, without STEVE it could take many months after a death occurs in a state for them to send the record to the state of residence and state of birth. This seriously impacts the ability of states to provide both timely data for public health and administrative functions.

Thanks to the subcommittee’s bipartisan leadership and support over many years, NCHS and the vital records jurisdictions have made significant progress in modernizing the vital

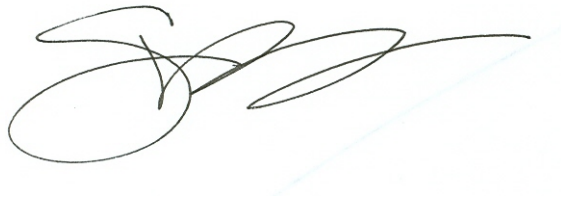
statistics infrastructure to enhance both data quality and timeliness. For example, most states now have operational electronic birth and death registration systems (EBRS and EDRS) and have adopted the 2003 Standard Certificates of Birth, Death, and Fetal Death, which are much more robust sources of public health data than the older 1989 certificates. Through the subcommittee's support in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2016, NCHS now has the funding necessary to ensure that jurisdictions are able to transition to fully electronic reporting of deaths for more timely collection of better quality death data—an essential tool in fighting waste, fraud, and abuse in federal benefits programs.

However, we fear that without new investment in the next generation "STEVE 2.0" system, the subcommittee's vision will not be realized as data are unable to flow between jurisdictions and NCHS. After nearly ten years, STEVE's antiquated architecture cannot keep pace with technological advances and user needs. Because the system's technology obsolescence poses security vulnerabilities, STEVE is no longer viable and must be replaced. Funding is needed to support the development of "STEVE 2.0."

NAPHSIS, the jurisdictions we represent, and the data user community are grateful that the subcommittee has consistently prioritized the building of a 21st Century vital statistics system. We respectfully ask that you provide \$5 million for NCHS in FY 2018 to support the next generation of electronic vital records registration systems, including "STEVE 2.0," so jurisdictions may continue to improve the quality and timeliness of reporting to NCHS and the secure and timely collection and sharing of birth and death records.

We appreciate your consideration and welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our Washington Representative, Emily Holubowich at eholubowich@dc-crd.com or (202) 484-1100.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shawna Webster', is written over a light blue diagonal line that extends from the bottom left towards the right.

Shawna Webster
Interim Executive Director, NAPHSIS