



October 27, 2022

Dr. Jennifer Shuford, MD, MPH
Texas Department of State Health Services
PO Box 149347
Austin, Texas 78714-9347

Dear Commissioner Shuford,

We, members of Trust Respect Access, a coalition comprised of reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations committed to restoring abortion access in Texas, submit this letter in response to the Texas Dept. of State and Health Services and the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee's decision to delay the scheduled Sept. 1 release of the 2022 Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee and Department of State Health Services Joint Biennial Report, as mandated by Section 34.015(A) of the Texas Health and Safety Code.

It has been nearly two months since the DSHS and Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee missed the deadline to release the latest available count of pregnancy and childbirth-related deaths. Your plans to now hold this data until next summer is simply unacceptable and sends the wrong message to Texans about the value of families and our reproductive health. This setback prevents Texas lawmakers from using the data, which covers deaths from 2019, until the 2025 legislative cycle. Legislators need this data to more precisely determine the causes of and solutions to the maternal mortality crisis in Texas.

The most recent data, which is nearly a decade old, revealed that the maternal mortality rate doubled over a two-year period. By now, Texas' failed maternal health policies have incited a crisis in Texas. Texas has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the country, driven by its failure to provide access to high-quality prenatal and maternal care or Medicaid coverage for new parents after giving birth. Over the last year, extreme abortion restrictions have only worsened maternal health outcomes in the state. Researchers at Parkland Health and UT Southwestern Medical Center found that Texas' near-total abortion ban has doubled the risk of serious pregnancy complications, as doctors contemplate when to administer care under threat of civil or criminal penalties.

This crisis disproportionately affects Black Texans, who are three times more likely to die from maternal causes than white people. Latinx Texans also experience higher rates of severe maternal morbidity. The information in this report is needed to determine current disparities in pregnancy-related deaths, as well as health conditions and factors that disproportionately



affect Black Texans as the most at-risk population. This information is critical to our work as advocates fighting for reproductive freedom in Texas. Without it, we cannot know the severity of maternal morbidity in this state, and it jeopardizes our ability to fully address the needs of the communities we serve.

The DSHS and Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee cannot claim to care about parents or pregnant people while continuing to withhold this data. This delay obstructs any action to reduce or prevent Texas' death rate, which will affect health outcomes for Texans for years to come. With a near-total abortion ban in place and one of the highest maternal death rates in the country, withholding this data only puts more lives at risk.

We, the undersigned, hereby urge the DSHS and the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee to complete and publish the 2022 Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee and Department of State Health Services Joint Biennial Report now and without further delay.

Sincerely,

The Afiya Center
The Lilith Fund
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice
ACLU of Texas
Avow Texas
Texas Freedom Network