October 27, 2015

The Honorable Katherine Clark
U.S. House of Representatives
1721 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Clark:

On behalf of the 24,000 members of the Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN), I write in support of the Bringing Postpartum Depression Out of the Shadows Act of 2015. This important legislation will increase access to screening and treatment for maternal depression.

AWHONN is a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to the health of women and newborns. Our members are staff nurses, nurse practitioners, nursing school faculty, certified nurse-midwives, and nurse executives who work in hospitals, independent practices, universities, and community clinics throughout the United States. Nurses serve a vital role in maximizing the health and health care experiences of pregnant women and new mothers, and AWHONN members know first-hand the challenges associated with mood and anxiety disorders in pregnant and postpartum women.

Perinatal mood disorders occur on a continuum. Extreme manifestations are life threatening for women and newborns. Even in their more common manifestations, perinatal mood and anxiety disorders can affect the woman’s health, her ability to connect with her child, her relationship with her partner, and her child’s long-term health and development. For example, women with untreated depression during pregnancy are more likely to have trouble sleeping; poor nutrition and inadequate weight gain; missed prenatal visits; and greater use of harmful substances like tobacco, alcohol, or illegal drugs. They are also less likely to follow a health care provider’s advice. For her child, a woman’s depression during pregnancy is associated with preterm birth, low birth weight, developmental and cognitive delays, increased crying, and problems with bonding. The short- and long-term effects of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders will continue to be discovered as nurses and other scientists conduct research in this area.

The Bringing Postpartum Depression Out of the Shadows Act of 2015 will allow states to build upon successful efforts to increase screening and treatment for maternal depression. AWHONN wholeheartedly supports this important legislation. We applaud your leadership in the area of maternal depression, as well as your ongoing efforts to make women’s health a national priority. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact Kerri Wade, AWHONN’s Director of Government and Media Affairs at kwade@awhonn.org.

Sincerely,

Lynn Erdman, MN, RN, FAAN
Chief Executive Officer