Beat: Health

U.S. bill targets babies born dependent on opioids

U.S.

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USPA NEWS - A bill that aims to protect babies born to mothers who used heroin or other opioids during pregnancy was introduced on Wednesday in the House as part of the government´s response to a Reuters investigation.

The bipartisan measure would require federal and state governments to do a better job of monitoring the health and safety of babies born drug-dependent. Last week ““ and also in response to the Reuters investigation ““ a similar bill moved to the Senate floor and the U.S. Health and Human Services Department pledged reforms.
“We must do everything we can to safeguard the most vulnerable among us,“ Representative Lou Barletta, a Pennsylvania Republican, said in a statement on Wednesday. Barletta is the bill's prime sponsor.
Reuters found that 110 U.S. children who were exposed to opioids while in the womb later died preventable deaths at home ““ and that thousands more each year do not receive social supports required by a 2003 law. The news agency also found that no more than nine states comply with this law, which calls on hospitals to alert social workers whenever a baby is born dependent on drugs.
The House bill would require states to report each year the number of infants identified as born drug-dependent, and the number for whom plans of safe care are developed. The bill also calls for the distribution of “best practices“ to social workers developing plans of safe care for the newborns and their caretakers.

“This legislation puts families at the center of care and ensures that babies and mothers affected by substance use disorders get the help they need,“ the lead Democratic sponsor, Katherine Clark of Massachusetts, said in a statement.
The bill follows a hearing last week in which Representative John Kline, chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee and a cosponsor of the bill, quizzed a senior Obama administration official on the federal government´s enforcement of the 2003 law and the Reuters series.
Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell told Kline that her agency has revamped its policies and planned to be "more proactive" with states. Thus far, she said, HHS has directed South Carolina to resolve unspecified problems. All other states have been directed to update HHS by June on their social service efforts to help drug-dependent babies and their parents.
(Editing by Matthew Lewis)

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