

**Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Subcommittee on Health  
Hearing:  
“H.R. 20, the Melanie Blocker-Stokes Postpartum Depression and Care Act”**

**Opening Statement**

**May 1, 2007**

**Good afternoon. The hearing will come to order. Today the Subcommittee is meeting to hear about “H.R. 20, the Melanie Blocker-Stokes Postpartum Depression and Care Act”. This bill is sponsored by my good friend Congressman Bobby Rush, who will be joining us today. I welcome him to the Subcommittee and thank him for all the work he has done to develop this thoughtful and important piece of legislation.**

**Postpartum depression is a devastating mood disorder ranging from the “baby blues” to full blown postpartum psychosis. Postpartum conditions strike many women during and after pregnancy. It is estimated that 400,000 women suffer from postpartum mood changes, with baby blue afflicting up to eighty percent of new mothers. Beyond the baby blues, postpartum mood and anxiety disorders impair around ten to twenty percent of new mothers and postpartum psychosis strikes one in one thousand new mothers.**

**The causes of postpartum depression are complex and unknown at this time. However, if diagnosed properly and treated with social support, therapy and medication, relief is highly attainable. All too often, however, postpartum depression goes undiagnosed because providers are not trained to detect the symptoms or the condition goes untreated due to social stigma or embarrassment. Needless to say, we must be more aggressive in our efforts to increase awareness and improve education among women as well as their health care providers, so we can ensure women suffering from postpartum depression receive the care and treatment the need to stay healthy.**

**I am particularly grateful to New Jersey’s former first lady, Mary Jo Codey, who is here with us today, for her leadership in raising awareness about mental health issues, particularly about postpartum depression. Mrs. Codey, as well as her husband, former Acting Governor and current State Senate President Richard Codey, have been tremendous advocates for those who suffer from mental illnesses in my home state of New Jersey.**

**Thanks to their efforts, New Jersey has a new Postpartum Depression and Screening and Education Law, which took effect last October. Now, every pregnant woman in New Jersey is educated about maternal mood**

disorders before giving birth; the mother of every baby born in the state will be screened for postpartum depression; and all licensed health care professionals who provide pre and post-natal care will be education about maternal depression.

Clearly, Mrs. Codey's personal dedication to bringing light to these conditions, which are all too often overlooked and misinterpreted has had a great impact in New Jersey. Thank you for being here today Mary Jo and for all that you do.

Mrs. Codey will be the first to tell you that our job is far from done. So much more research needs to go into what causes postpartum depression and how best to treat it. That is why this legislation is critically important and why I support it. I wholeheartedly agree that appropriate research and attention needs to be devoted to this issue, and I pledge to work with Mr. Rush to move this bill to the floor as quickly as possible. As we will hear from our witnesses today, we cannot afford to delay. Too many lives are on the line.

I would like to thank all of our witnesses for appearing before us today. I would like to extend a warm welcome to Ms. Blocker, the mother of the woman for whom this legislation is named in honor. Thank you for being here today, for sharing your and your daughter's story with us, and for all the work you do as an advocate on this issue.

I now recognize my good friend from Georgia, Mr. Deal, for five minutes, for the purpose of making an opening statement.