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### **HHS Complies with Casey/McConnell Protecting Our Infants Act (POIA) POIA elevated a focus on prenatal maternal opioid use and the impact on infants**

**January 23<sup>rd</sup>** – America has been experiencing a troubling time of divisive political discourse and too often bipartisan efforts to improve the lives of children and their families prove elusive.

Still a recent invitation from The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is a reminder that there has been a degree of bipartisan urgency to try and address how the unrelenting opioid crisis is impacting America - across generations, demographics, and communities.

HHS' recently unveiled The Protecting Our Infants (POIA) report. The POIA report grew out of bipartisan efforts in the United States Senate led by [Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell \(R-Kentucky\)](#)<sup>1</sup> and [Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey, Jr.](#)<sup>2</sup>

HHS will receive comments on elements of the POIA report through 5:00 p.m. on February 21, 2017.<sup>3</sup>

#### ***Background on The POIA (S. 799) enacted in November 2015***

In November 2015, President Barack Obama signed S. 799 into law directing HHS to “conduct a review of planning and coordination related to prenatal opioid use, including neonatal abstinence syndrome, within the agencies of the Department of Health and Human Services.”<sup>4</sup>

In advancing S. 799, Casey underscored: “Children suffering from opioid withdrawal and their families go through an unimaginable struggle but there’s far too little known about how to prevent and treat this condition. Advancing this legislation is an important step in our efforts to help these vulnerable children and their families.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mcconnell.senate.gov/public/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/799/cosponsors>

<sup>3</sup> Federal Register, Volume 82, No. 12/Thursday, January 19, 2017 pages 6590 and 6591. Retrieved at <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2017-01-19/pdf/FR-2017-01-19.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Public Law No: 114-91

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.casey.senate.gov/newsroom/releases/senators-mcconnell-and-caseys-protecting-our-infants-act-advances>

Through the POIA, Congress instructed HHS to “develop a strategy to address gaps in research and gaps, overlap, and duplication among Federal programs.”<sup>6</sup>

HHS’ review and strategies were to build upon the foundation of information and findings put forth by the Government Accountability Office’s (GAO) February 2015 report entitled *Prenatal Drug Use and Newborn Health: Federal Efforts Need Better Planning and Coordination*.<sup>7</sup> At that time, GAO recommended that HHS “designate a focal point to lead departmental planning and coordination on these issues.”

HHS was to address gaps in research with respect to:

- “The most appropriate treatment of pregnant women with opioid use disorders;

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-203>