

MEMORANDUM

To: All House Members

From: Representative Jesse White

Re: Co-sponsorship of Legislation – Pulse Oximetry Testing for Newborns

Date: February 28, 2012

I will be introducing legislation in the near future that would require all hospitals to perform pulse oximetry screening on newborns in order to detect congenital heart defects.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), congenital heart defects (CHDs) account for nearly 24% of infant deaths. In addition, approximately 12% of babies born each year have one of the seven critical congenital heart defects (CCHDs). Newborns that are not screened for CHDs are at great risk of death or life-long disabilities. Pulse oximetry testing can help prevent either possibility by making sure that newborns have the appropriate amount of oxygen in their bloodstream. The benefit of pulse oximetry screening is that it can effectively detect CCHDs as well as other heart defects before babies begin to show signs of a heart condition.

Although some hospitals perform pulse oximetry newborn screening, not all hospitals are required by law to do so. Meanwhile, an estimated 280 infants with an undiagnosed CCHD are discharged each year from hospitals in the United States. As mentioned earlier, a lack of diagnosis can lead to disabilities and even death in some cases. My legislation would address this important issue by amending the Newborn Child Testing Act to require all hospitals in Pennsylvania to perform pulse oximetry testing within 24 hours of a newborn's birth. If a CHD is detected, infants can then begin seeing a cardiologist in order to receive the specialized care that they critically need.

This issue was brought to my attention by a constituent who had his newborn daughter rushed to the hospital, because of a heart defect, which would have likely been detected had this test been done at birth.

If you wish to be added as a co-sponsor, please contact Dominic Lemmon via email at dlemmon@pahouse.net or by calling (717) 783-6437.