



*Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc
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**Premature Birth Rates on the Rise
March of Dimes and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority to Call Attention to the
Problem With Prematurity Awareness Events November 16 & 18**

In response to the significant rise in premature births, the March of Dimes and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority are holding awareness events for prematurity in November. The March of Dimes is leading a national Prematurity Awareness Day observance on Tuesday, November 18. Zeta members in 800 communities in the U. S. are conducting Prematurity Awareness Sunday activities in houses of worship. The sorority has also targeted 49 cities and the US Virgin Islands for an expanded public awareness media and government affairs campaign. Here in Prince George's County participating congregations include: Franklin P. Nash and Union United Methodist Churches, Canaan Baptist Church and New Rock Church of Fire.

Prematurity affects one out of eight babies born in the U.S. today—a rate that has increased 27 percent since 1981. The numbers are even more alarming for African-American babies who have a one- in-six chance of being born too soon. In Maryland, over 17% of all African-American and 11% Hispanic babies are born early.

In addition to the emotional toll, there is a tangible cost to premature birth as well. In 2001, average hospital charges in the United States for the most severe cases of prematurity were nearly 60 times higher than the charges for newborn stays without complications. Prematurity is the leading cause of newborn death (in the first month of life) and many of those babies who survive leave the hospital with lifelong health conditions or developmental disabilities that will place additional financial burden on the family.

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Earlier this year, the March of Dimes launched a five-year, \$75 million national campaign to educate women to support research into the causes of premature birth, and to educate the public and health care professionals about the escalating health problem of prematurity.

Despite its prevalence, many families endure the trauma of a premature birth, and all too often infant death, privately and silently. Most people are unaware of the scope of this common and costly health problem. "We want to help the March of Dimes educate the public," said (Corliss A. McCain, Tau Delta Zeta Chapter President of Zeta Phi Beta. "So we are bringing this vital information to the places where we worship, one of the cores of community life. This issue affects so many in the community, it seems like the right thing to do." Zetas along with the March of Dimes will provide churches with brochures on explaining the dangers of prematurity in addition to including information in church bulletins and announcements. Tau Delta Zeta Chapter, based in Laurel, has also targeted members of the Latino community. St. Camillo's, St. Michael's the Arch Angel and Sacred Heart are three churches with predominantly Hispanic populations that have agreed to participate in Prematurity Awareness Sunday.

In addition to local congregational observances, McCain explained everyone can participate in the national March of Dimes observance by going to www.marchofdimes.com and clicking on the baby band. CIGNA, a prematurity campaign corporate sponsor, will donate \$1 for each click up to \$150,000. The March of Dimes will take these "clicks" and use them to demonstrate to Congress and government health officials the intensity of interest in increasing the amount of research dollars available to find the causes of premature birth. "I'm going to click," said McCain, "and I'm asking 10 of my friends to click and pass it on, too."

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated was founded in 1920 in Washington, D.C., on the belief that the social nature of sorority life should not overshadow the real mission for progressive organizations to address societal mores, ills, prejudices, poverty, and health concerns of the day. The international organization's over 100,000 initiated members, operating in more than 800 chapters, have given millions of voluntary hours to educate the public, provide scholarships, support organized charities, and promote legislation for social and civic change. For more information on Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., please visit their Web site at www.zphib1920.org.

The March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency whose mission is to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects and infant mortality. Founded in 1938, the March of Dimes funds programs of research, community services, education, and advocacy to save babies and in 2003 launched a five-year campaign to address the increasing rate of premature birth. For more information, visit the March of Dimes Web site at marchofdimes.com or its Spanish Web site at nacersano.org.

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