

SENATE HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES AND SENIOR
CITIZENS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION No. 102

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 9, 2024

The Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee reports favorably Senate Joint Resolution No. 102.

This resolution designates May 17 of each year as NEC Awareness Day in the State of New Jersey.

Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC) is a devastating intestinal disease that can affect medically fragile infants. The condition causes inflammation and tissue damage which may lead to systemic infection, neurological complications, and developmental delays. Infants afflicted with NEC often require incubation, and can pass away within hours of a turn in their condition. Symptoms and risk factors may be as innocuous as low birthweight, poor blood circulation, blood oxygenation level, difficulty nursing, and the stress of the birthing process.

Despite limited public understanding for the inflammatory disorder, NEC is the third most common cause of hospitalization and death in neonatal infants. NEC affects one in 1,000 premature infants; its mortality rate is 20 to 30 percent and 42 percent for the smallest premature infants. The condition affects two to five percent of all premature infants but is responsible for up to 20 percent of Neonatal Intensive Care Unit costs.

Of those who survive the condition, 89 percent report long term complications including cardiac issues, motor skill loss, respiratory impairment, lost time at work, and hearing and vision challenges. The condition produces an increased risk of later functional impairment including cerebral palsy, fine and gross motor skill loss, and behavioral issues. Survivors experience poor executive function and worse working memory capacity over time.

Several social determinants of health contribute to NEC prevalence. Risk factors include maternal cocaine abuse, smoking, and congenital heart disease. Mode of birth delivery and formula feeding are other precursors to the disease.

NEC imposes a long-term financial burden on families and medical systems across the State and nation. When considering lifelong medical repercussions, NEC results in approximately \$5.8 billion in U.S. hospital expenses each year, or 19 percent of neonatal healthcare expenditures and \$200,000 in costs for each infant receiving

surgery. NEC is the second most costly morbidity of prematurity in the U.S., impacting families not only financially but emotionally as they cope with challenging pregnancies, unmet rehabilitation needs, frequent hospital readmittance, and repeated medical procedures upon birth.

With this in mind, it is in public interest for New Jersey citizens to increase their awareness of Necrotizing Enterocolitis and protective measures. Recognizing May 17 as a commemorative day for this condition, in keeping with the designated World NEC Awareness Day and California's recently proclaimed NEC Awareness Day, would commit public recognition to an under-acknowledged health concern.