

Shades of Blue Project Secures First-Ever Federal Funding for Newborn Supply Kits

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Historic \$5 million FY 2026 investment dramatically expands the Newborn Essentials Support Toolkits (NEST) Pilot and strengthens momentum for the NEST Act – an initiative the Shades of Blue Project has led for three years.

Washington, D.C. - The Shades of Blue Project, a national leader in advancing maternal mental health supports for underserved communities, announced today a landmark federal appropriations victory: Congress included the first-ever \$5,000,000 in funding and accompanying language for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) [Newborn Essentials Supply Toolkit \(NEST\) Pilot](#) in the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations package.

For the past three years, the NEST pilot has existed without dedicated federal funding, limiting its ability to scale. This historic investment changes that by providing the resources needed to significantly grow the HHS pilot's reach and impact, and marking a major step forward in national recognition of the connection between maternal mental health, financial stress, and early postpartum supports. It's also a defining moment for the Shades of Blue Project, whose leadership and advocacy have shaped and sustained this program since its inception.

The need is urgent. The cost of a baby's first year now averages nearly \$20,000, with baby-related expenses accounting for roughly 31 percent of parents' income. Nearly nine in ten mothers report that financial stress harms their mental health, and maternal mental health conditions remain the leading cause of pregnancy-related death in the United States. Meanwhile, the affordability crisis is putting more pressure on families already stretched thin.

For the first time, Congress has directed HHS to expand the existing pilot with congressionally appropriated funding and provided clear guidance on program implementation, representing a critical step forward in advancing the *Newborn Essential Supply Toolkit (NEST) Act* (H.R. 6096), which would authorize and grow the program in statute. By securing federal funding and clear congressional direction, this package builds precedent and momentum for growth in the long term.

[NEST kits](#) are designed to support mothers' recovery from childbirth during the critical postpartum period, and reflect models that community-based organizations, including the [Shades of Blue Project](#), have implemented for years to help families meet basic needs. Kits may include diapers, wipes, blankets, infant thermometers, postpartum and breastfeeding supplies, blood pressure monitors, educational materials on breastfeeding and information on postpartum supports. Congress further directed HHS to prioritize geographic diversity, with an emphasis on maternal care deserts, rural and Tribal communities, and areas with the highest maternal mortality rates.

“This funding is a game-changer and a powerful acknowledgment that practical, early supports can make a real difference for maternal mental health,” said **Kay Matthews, Executive Director of the Shades of Blue Project**. “For three years, this pilot has proven what's possible. Now, with

real federal investment behind it, we can reach far more families with critical supplies and trusted information during one of the most vulnerable moments in their lives.”

The [Shades of Blue Project](#) expressed gratitude to both House and Senate appropriators for their leadership and support in securing both the historic funding level and the detailed report language needed to drive strong implementation.

Next week, the Shades of Blue Project will host a Congressional Roundtable in Washington, D.C., bringing together congressional champions, partners, and stakeholders to celebrate this milestone and continue building for the NEST Act. To RSVP for the in-person event, see [here](#).

To learn more about the Shades of Blue Project, visit www.shadesofblueproject.org.

About the Shades of Blue Project

The Shades of Blue Project is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping women of color before, during and after child-birth with community resources, mental health advocacy, treatment and support.