FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 11, 2015

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American Heart Association pushes for newborn heart screenings in Washington
Rep. Marcus Riccelli sponsors HB 1285 to require screening for congenital heart defects

SEATTLE – Expectant parents focus on the exciting details surrounding their baby’s birth. They prepare the nursery in just the right color, pick out just the right clothes, and research the safest car seat. All of that attention to make sure to make sure their beautiful baby is comforted and protected. But sadly in Washington state one critical detail is often missed when a child is born: a simple check of the baby’s heart health.

The American Heart Association (AHA) estimated that at least 40,000 children are born with a heart defect every year in the United States. That’s why the AHA is supporting pulse oximetry testing as a requirement for all newborns. Pulse oximetry screening, called pulse ox for short, is simple, painless and inexpensive – a sensor is placed on a baby’s foot to detect the amount of oxygen in the blood stream. It’s the most effective way to screen for congenital heart defects, the world’s number one birth defect and the leading cause of death for children with a birth defect.

Representative Marcus Riccelli of Spokane, Wash., who previously passed legislation to speed up the processing of newborn screening results, is the sponsor of House Bill 1285. “Early detection is critical for the health and wellness of a child. Pulse ox can help identify more than 90 percent of congenital heart defects in babies. Screening all of Washington’s newborns will save lives.”

Pulse ox testing could have meant earlier care for the child born to Amy Norton in Marysville, Wash. Her son’s heart defect went undetected for 10 weeks until he turned bluish one day. The delayed detection resulted in open heart surgery and a lengthy hospital stay.

Thirty-five states have already passed laws requiring the test to be conducted. In New Jersey, a newborn’s life was saved because of a pulse ox test, just hours after the screening law took effect.

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About the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association
The American Heart Association and the American Stroke Association are devoted to saving people from heart disease and stroke – the two leading causes of death in the world. We team with millions of volunteers to fund innovative research, fight for stronger public health policies, and provide lifesaving tools and information to prevent and treat these diseases. The Dallas-based American Heart Association is the nation’s oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke. The American Stroke Association is a division of the American Heart Association. To learn more or to get involved, call 1-800-AHA-USA1, visit heart.org or call any of our offices around the country. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.