Legislative session 2020 has been anything but normal. As March approached, we were anticipating a victorious session. Many of the coalitions that NBEC is involved in were ready to organize, go out, and advocate for bills that mattered most to them and the health of Louisiana residents. Unfortunately, March came in and brought havoc along with it. COVID-19 made its impact on the United States. As a result, the nation, the state, and every city went into lock down and legislative session was suspended on March 16, 2020.

NBEC began the legislative session with a Policy Agenda of eight bills. After a month and a half of watching and waiting to see when session would reconvene, we continued to work towards those original eight bills. As we found out more information about the uncertainty of the session, we cut our agenda, to a policy watch with only 4 bills aligned with birth equity.

It was a blow to learn that many important bills would not be heard on May 4, when legislators came back. Priorities for the now shortened session were bills related to COVID, the economy, and the budget, which had to be completed by July 1, 2020.

All of the advocacy organizations had to change the bills they focused on and the face of advocacy transformed from in-person to virtual testimonies and rallies. Phone calls, letters, emails, and the usage of social media are pushed even more as impactful advocacy tools. Louisiana’s online rallies via Zoom and Facebook live had more than 100 participants, in some cases. Individuals were also encouraged to email legislative committees their written testimonies with limited access to the capitol.

Key challenges with legislative session that result from COVID-19 are:

- Shortened session to a month long.
- Limited access to legislators and to the capitol during hearings.
- Some legislators opted out of coming to hearings due to their health concerns.

We send our condolences to the family of Representative Reggie Bagala who died in April as a result of COVID-19, and all other policymakers whose lives were impacted by coronavirus. In this trying time, community based organizations have strengthened our skillset on how to reach people when physical hinderances exist.

This session has been quite interesting, to say the least. The regular session officially adjourned on June 1, 2020.