



National Center for Health Statistics
6525 Belcrest Road
Hyattsville, Maryland 20782

January 20, 1999

Mr. James P. Scanlan
1527 30th Street, NW
Apt. B-2
Washington, DC 20007

Dear Mr. Scanlan:

Your recent letter to Drs. Satcher and Hamburg was referred to me. Thank you for sending the articles and unpublished paper. Your points about the interpretation of trends in racial disparities in infant mortality are very interesting and important. They suggest that disparities should also be viewed in terms of absolute differences to avoid misinterpretation.

In addition to your observations, we note that historically, black age-adjusted death rates and infant mortality rates have been converging with white rates. That is, in terms of numerical difference, black rates are closer to white rates than in the past. However, as you correctly point out, the *ratio* of black to white rates is increasing over time. This seeming paradox is, in fact, a statistical artifact for the reasons you note in your papers and certainly warrants more careful explanation. I shall make copies of your papers available to my staff and colleagues.

Thank you very much for your concern regarding these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward J. Sondik", written over a large, stylized flourish.

Edward J. Sondik, Ph.D.
Director,
National Center for Health Statistics