May 9, 2021

Dear Members of the 117th Congress:

As your constituents, we warmly welcome you to the new congressional session and extend our best wishes for the years ahead. As you embrace opportunities to address national challenges during this session, we urge you to consider the role that human milk feeding plays in giving infants and mothers important and long-lasting health protections that contribute to significant public health cost savings.ⁱ

The evidence for the value of human milk to overall health for infants, children, and mothers is scientific, robust, and continually reaffirmed by new research.^{II} The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends infants be exclusively breastfed for about six months with continued breastfeeding while introducing complementary foods for at least one year.^{III} Breastfed infants are at lower risk of certain infections and sudden unexplained infant death.^{IV} Children who were breastfed have decreased risk of obesity, type 1 and 2 diabetes, asthma, and childhood leukemia.^V Women who breastfed reduce their risk of specific chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and breast and ovarian cancers.^{VI}

The majority of pregnant people and new mothers want to breastfeed.^{vii} Yet, numerous barriers in healthcare, community, and employment settings impede breastfeeding success.^{viii} While 84% of infants are breastfed at birth, only 25% of U.S. infants are still exclusively breastfed at six months of age.^{ix} There are persistent breastfeeding disparities by racial, geographic, and socioeconomic factors.^x The pandemic made matters worse. COVID-related maternity care practice shifts unduly compromised the establishment of breastfeeding, and the behavioral drivers of chronic disease—poor nutrition, inactive lifestyle, excessive drinking, and tobacco use—increased during the pandemic.^{xi} These facts suggest that COVID-19 will exacerbate negative health status trends for years to come.

The American people, especially our babies, are the nation's most valuable resource. We must support their health, vitality, and resilience through systemic interventions that ensure every family has the opportunity to reach their breastfeeding goals. Thank you for your careful consideration of the following priorities you can move forward in the 117th Congress to help support lactating families:

• Increase Funding for Breastfeeding in the Federal Budget

- Given the importance of human milk feeding in establishing good nutrition, healthy weight, and in reducing the risk of chronic disease, we urge Congress to increase funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Hospitals Promoting Breastfeeding program to help states, tribes, communities, and hospitals implement upstream interventions that support breastfeeding families and positively impact the health of the American people. Lactation support is also an important component of a wide range of federally funded programs, including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program, State Physical Activity and Nutrition, Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, Healthy Start, and beyond. We urge Congress to invest in breastfeeding as a public health imperative.
- Address Gaps in Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergency Response and Recovery Systems

 COVID-19 revealed fissures in our national capacity to coordinate infant and young child feeding in emergencies. Protecting and supporting breastfeeding is essential to ensuring critical food security and immunologic protection for our nation's youngest residents in an emergency. The pandemic and the myriad natural disasters that plagued the country in 2020 demonstrated that states and tribes lack the infrastructure to coordinate lactation support services and the provision of breastfeeding equipment during emergencies.^{xii} We urge Congress to take action to ensure families have access to appropriate breastfeeding services and supplies during a disaster or pandemic.

• Access to Paid Family & Medical Leave:

 In the U.S., nearly 1 in 4 employed mothers return to work within two weeks of childbirth.^{xiii} Research shows that access to paid family and medical leave contributes to improved breastfeeding outcomes.^{xiv} Guaranteed paid leave associated with the birth or adoption of a child is a vital component of maternal and child health and should be available for all parents across the United States. We urge Congress to establish a national paid family and medical leave program accessible to all workers.

• Access to Breastfeeding Support and Supplies

 Most health plans are required to cover the costs of lactation support services and breastfeeding equipment and supplies.^{xv} However, implementation of the federal guidelines by insurance providers has been inconsistent, and many families struggle to access the supplies and services they need.^{xvi} The pandemic revealed that rural and economically marginalized urban communities with limited broadband access also lacked access to telehealth lactation support services.^{xvii} We urge Congress to work with the Health Resources and Service Administration to strengthen the Women's Preventive Services guidelines for breastfeeding and increase access to telehealth services.

• Maternity Care Practices

In response to COVID-19, birthing facilities instituted infection control policies that critically destabilized maternity care practices proven to support breastfeeding initiation and early success. These disruptions included limitations on the number and type of birth supporters; mother-infant dyad separations, even in the absence of suspected COVID-19 infection; and rapid discharge procedures, often with poor access to skilled in-person or virtual lactation support.^{xviii} Dyad separations disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and immigrant communities as evidence suggests an uneven application of the policies based on race and insurance status, with communities of color and those with public insurance being unfairly targeted.^{xix} We urge Congress to work with and invest in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to increase the implementation of evidence-based maternity care practices that enable breastfeeding.

As a member of the 117th Congress, we encourage your leadership on these critical policy priorities. Congressional history shows that breastfeeding is truly a bipartisan issue that legislators from both sides of the aisle can agree on. Families are counting on all of us to work together and eliminate the barriers that impede breastfeeding success.

We look forward to working with you to advance these policy priorities.

SIGNATORY ORGANIZATIONS

International, National, Tribal, Regional, and Cultural Organizations:

1,000 Days A Better Balance Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics American Association of Birth Centers American College of Osteopathic Pediatricians American Public Health Association Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs Association of State Public Health Nutritionists **Attachment Parenting International** Baby Cafe USA Baby-Friendly USA, Inc. Black Lactation Circle (BLaC) **Breastfeeding USA Breastfeeding Family Friendly Communities** Bright Future Lactation Resource Centre Ltd. CAI (formerly Cicatelli Associates Inc.) Center for Breastfeeding Information Research Library Center for Health Equity Education and Research Coalition of Labor Union Women, AFL-CIO **Dancing For Birth Equal Rights Advocates** Every Mother, Inc. HealthConnect One Healthy Children Project, Inc. Human Milk Banking Association of North America International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners Lactation Concierge Services LLC Lactation Education Resources La Leche League Alliance La Leche League USA Legal Voice LiquidGoldConcept, Inc. Mamava Mom2Mom Global and Breastfeeding in **Combat Boots** MomsRising

Mothers' Milk Bank Northeast National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities NARAL Pro-Choice America National Lactation Consultant Alliance, Inc. National Medical Association National WIC Association Nutritious Motherhood Health & Wellness Coaching Precious Jewels Moms Ministries Prevention & Treatment of Traumatic Childbirth Pumpspotting Shriver Center on Poverty Law U.S. Lactation Consultant Association U.S. Breastfeeding Committee

State, and Local Organizations:

<u>Alabama</u> Alabama Breastfeeding Committee Baobab Birth Collective

<u>Alaska</u> Alaska Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Arizona</u> Arizona Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Arkansas</u> Arkansas Breastfeeding Coalition

California Baby Cafe Bakersfield Breast Beginnings BreastfeedLA Breastfeeding USA California Breastfeeding Coalition Geelo Wellness Hohm Press & Kalindi Publishers Mother's Own Milk Matters Nurturely San Diego County Breastfeeding Coalition So Zen Birth Services

<u>Colorado</u>

Colorado Children's Campaign Raise Colorado Coalition

<u>Connecticut</u> Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Delaware</u> Breastfeeding Coalition of Delaware

<u>District of Columbia</u> District of Columbia Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Florida</u>

Breastfeeding Coalition of Palm Beach County Chaires Community Life Enrichment Center, Inc. Florida Lactation Consultant Association Inc Lactation Whisperer Lioness Lactation LLC

Georgia Georgia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics Oya Birth and Wellness Pea Pod Nutrition and Lactation Support Two Doulas & You

<u>Guam</u> The Birth Tribe

<u>Hawaii</u> Breastfeeding Hawaii

<u>Illinois</u> Sudden Infant Death Services of Illinois, Inc. Women Employed

Indiana Indiana Breastfeeding Coalition Sonder Health

<u>Iowa</u> Iowa Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Kansas</u> Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Kentucky</u> Lactation Improvement Coalition of Kentucky Louisiana Louisiana Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Maine</u> Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Maryland</u> Maryland Breastfeeding Coalition University of Maryland Shore Medical Center at Easton

<u>Massachusetts</u> Massachusetts Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Michigan</u> Berrien County Breastfeeding Coalition Lactation Lighthouse Metro Detroit/ Wayne County Breastfeeding Coalition Michigan Breastfeeding Network

<u>Minnesota</u> Children's Hospital of Minnesota Gender Justice Mewinzha Ondaadiziike Wiigaming

<u>Mississippi</u> With Milk and Honey, LLC

<u>Missouri</u> Marillac Indigent Care Fund People's Health Centers WIC Program

<u>Montana</u> Lactation Consultants of Montana Montana State Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Nebraska</u> CHI Health Centers

<u>Nevada</u> Kijiji Sisterhood

<u>New Jersey</u> All Four Trimesters New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition Solutions for Breastfeeding Speaking of Birth <u>New Mexico</u> New Mexico Breastfeeding Task Force

<u>New York</u> Bronx Breastfeeding Coalition Morrisania WIC Program New York City Breastfeeding Leadership Council, Inc. New York Statewide Breastfeeding Coalition, Inc. Supporting Our Mothers Initiative, LLC The New York Milk Bank

<u>North Carolina</u> Branches Lactation and Infant Feeding North Carolina Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>North Dakota</u> North Dakota Breastfeeding Coalition Women, Infants, Children Program, Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota

<u>Ohio</u> Ohio Breastfeeding Alliance Ohio Lactation Consultant Association WIC Program Mahoning County

<u>Oklahoma</u> Coalition of Oklahoma Breastfeeding Advocates

<u>Oregon</u> African American Breastfeeding Coalition of Oregon Columbia Gorge Postpartum Support

<u>Pennsylvania</u> Breastfeeding Latinas Pennsylvania Breastfeeding Coalition Pretty Mama Breastfeeding LLC WellSpan York Hospital Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania Women's Law Project

<u>Puerto Rico</u> Alimentacion Segura Infantil

<u>South Carolina</u> A2Z Lactation, LLC Clemson University South Carolina Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Tennessee</u> Tennessee Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Texas</u> Breastfeeding Perspectives Parkland Health & Hospital System

<u>Virginia</u> #757Breastfeeds Virginia Breastfeeding Advisory Committee Virginia Breastfeeding Coalition

<u>Washington</u> Breastfeeding Coalition of Washington

<u>West Virginia</u> West Virginia Breastfeeding Alliance

<u>Wisconsin</u> Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc. Green Lake County Department of Health and Harambee Village Doulas Human Services Wisconsin Association of Lactation Consultants Wisconsin Breastfeeding Coalition

ⁱ The Cost of Not Breastfeeding. https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/cost-not-breastfeeding/36187. Published 2019. Accessed April 28, 2021.

ⁱⁱ Benefits of Breastfeeding. AAP.org. https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-healthinitiatives/Breastfeeding/Pages/Benefits-of-Breastfeeding.aspx. Published 2020. Accessed January 22, 2020.

^{iv} Making the decision to breastfeed | womenshealth.gov. womenshealth.gov. https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/making-decision-breastfeed/#1. Published 2020. Accessed January 22, 2020.

^{vii} *Breastfeeding Report Card, 2020.* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/reportcard.htm. Accessed March 24, 2021.

^{ix} Results: Breastfeeding Rates | Breastfeeding | CDC. Cdc.gov. https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/nis_data/results.html. Published 2019. Accessed January 22, 2020.

^x Breastfeeding Report Card, 2020. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/reportcard.htm. Accessed March 24, 2021.

^{xi} One year on: Unhealthy weight gains, increased drinking reported by Americans coping with pandemic stress. https://www.apa.org. https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2021/03/one-year-pandemic-stress. Published 2021. Accessed April 9, 2021.

^{xii} *Voices From The Field: COVID- 19 & Infant Feeding*. U.S. Breastfeeding Committee; 2020. http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/d/do/3542. Accessed April 13, 2021.

xⁱⁱⁱ The Real War on Families: Why the U.S. Needs Paid Leave Now. In These Times. https://inthesetimes.com/article/the-realwar-on-families. Published 2015. Accessed April 28, 2021.

xiv The Role of Law and Policy in Assisting Families to Reach Healthy People's Maternal, Infant, and Child Health Breastfeeding Goals in the United States. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (ODPHP). Published 2020. https://www.healthypeople.gov/sites/default/files/MICH_report_2020.05.04_508_0.pdf. Accessed April 22, 2021.

^{xv} Women's Breastfeeding Services, Breastfeeding Services and Supplies. Women's Preventive Services Initiative. https://www.womenspreventivehealth.org/recommendations/breastfeeding-services-and-supplies/. Accessed April 28, 2021.

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^{xviii} Implementation Of Hospital Practices Supportive Of Breastfeeding In The Context Of COVID-19 — United States, July 15– August 20, 2020. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6947a3.htm. Accessed March 24, 2021.

^{xix} Seals Allers K, Green K. Covid-19 Restrictions on Birth & Breastfeeding: Disproportionately Harming Black and Native Women. Women's eNews. https://womensenews.org/2020/03/covid-19-restrictions-on-birth- breastfeeding-disproportionatelyharming-black-and-native-women/. Published 2020. Accessed April 23, 2020.