

To Congressional Appropriations Leadership: Hon. Senator Daniel Inouye, Hon. Sen. Thad Cochran, Hon. Senator Tom Harkin, Hon Rep. Dave Obey, Hon. Rep. Jerry Lewis, Hon. Rep. Todd Tiahrt

Cc: Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Assistant Secretary Howard Koh

The undersigned organizations, which represent a broad coalition committed to the health and wellbeing of children, mothers and families, urge Congress to undertake a concerted, multi-faceted effort to promote breastfeeding through the establishment of an Interagency Work Group on Breastfeeding coordinated by the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services. We also urge you to provide funding of \$15 million per year specified for breastfeeding programs. This funding, along with strong central leadership from an Interagency Work Group, is necessary to make substantial gains in our nation's breastfeeding rates.

Lack of breastfeeding increases the risk of a wide variety of acute and chronic diseases in children and adults. Research shows that suboptimal breastfeeding duration is an important contributor to our nation's epidemic of childhood obesity. Research also shows that suboptimal breastfeeding duration increases the risk of maternal breast cancer, maternal cardiovascular disease and maternal diabetes. A cost analysis now in press shows that the United States incurs at least \$13 billion per year in excess costs due to pediatric illness because of our suboptimal rates of breastfeeding.

Our nation's current breastfeeding rates fall far short of the universal medical recommendation to breastfeed exclusively for six months with continued breastfeeding for as long as desired by mother and child. In addition, enormous disparities exist across ethnic and geographic lines; groups with some of our poorest health outcomes have some of the lowest breastfeeding rates, such as Americans in the Southeastern states, and African-Americans all across the US.

Today, the only line-items in the federal budget dedicated specifically to breastfeeding are the peer-counseling program and state breastfeeding performance bonus grants under the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC). While other federal programs may address breastfeeding, these efforts are not directed by Congress and are subject to the shifting priorities of Administrations and political leadership.

We are therefore calling upon Congress to dedicate new sustainable line-item funding to breastfeeding in order to raise our nation's rates to approach the levels recommended by major national and international health organizations. Funding is required for strong central federal government leadership to strategically coordinate, develop and implement plans to accomplish the following:

- a) Transform the maternity care and infant feeding practices of our maternity facilities into fully evidence-based interventions (e.g., the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding), including health-professional education.
- b) Help shift social norms to ensure that breastfeeding is supported as the healthiest choice for infants and mothers.
- c) Support practices that allow working women to continue to breastfeed.
- d) Ensure sustainable federal oversight in all agencies that address maternal or child health with funding to carry out the necessary research, services and education.

We urge that this \$15 million be directed to the office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services. The Interagency Work Group on Breastfeeding, would then serve as the coordinating body that makes recommendations to the Secretary and departmental and agency leaders as to how to allocate these funds for research, education, and services in order to accomplish breastfeeding goals. At least one-third of the funds should be used to improve maternity care practices such as through building hospital collaboratives and training programs. Agencies that should participate in this council include but are not limited to the Department of Health and Human Services (including agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Office on Women's Health, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the Administration on Children and Families, the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research, and the Indian Health Service), the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labor, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Education, and Veterans' Affairs.

We believe that this new funding and the Interagency Work Group represent a sensible, cost-effective approach to coordinating and enhancing the federal government's efforts to promote and support breastfeeding. Given the well-documented health benefits of breastfeeding for mothers and babies, this Work Group is an investment that will produce measurable dividends many times over in improved health across our nation.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. For further information, please contact Dr. Melissa Bartick, one of the American Public Health Association's representatives to the US Breastfeeding Committee, at [melissabartick@gmail.com](mailto:melissabartick@gmail.com).

Respectfully,

American Public Health Association