

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:

Alabama

Alabama Breastfeeding Committee
Baobab Birth Collective

Alaska

Alaska Breastfeeding Coalition

Arizona

Arizona Breastfeeding Coalition

Arkansas

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

Colorado

Colorado Children's Campaign
Raise Colorado Coalition

Connecticut
Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition

Delaware
Breastfeeding Coalition of Delaware

District of Columbia
District of Columbia Breastfeeding Coalition

Florida
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

Guam
The Birth Tribe

Hawaii
Breastfeeding Hawaii

Illinois
Sudden Infant Death Services of Illinois, Inc.
Women Employed

Indiana
Indiana Breastfeeding Coalition
Sonder Health

Iowa
Iowa Breastfeeding Coalition

Kansas
Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition

Kentucky
Lactation Improvement Coalition of Kentucky

Louisiana
Louisiana Breastfeeding Coalition

Maine
Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition

Maryland
Maryland Breastfeeding Coalition
University of Maryland Shore Medical Center at
Easton

Massachusetts
Massachusetts Breastfeeding Coalition

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

Minnesota
Children's Hospital of Minnesota
Gender Justice
Mewinzha Ondaadiziike Wiigaming

Mississippi
With Milk and Honey, LLC

Missouri
Marillac Indigent Care Fund
People's Health Centers WIC Program

Montana
Lactation Consultants of Montana
Montana State Breastfeeding Coalition

Nebraska
CHI Health Centers

Nevada
Kijiji Sisterhood

New Jersey
All Four Trimesters
New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition
Solutions for Breastfeeding
Speaking of Birth

New Mexico

New Mexico Breastfeeding Task Force

New York

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

North Carolina

Branches Lactation and Infant Feeding

North Carolina Breastfeeding Coalition

North Dakota

North Dakota Breastfeeding Coalition

Women, Infants, Children Program, Minot Air Force Base, North Dakota

Ohio

Ohio Breastfeeding Alliance

Ohio Lactation Consultant Association

WIC Program Mahoning County

Oklahoma

Coalition of Oklahoma Breastfeeding Advocates

Oregon

African American Breastfeeding Coalition of Oregon

Columbia Gorge Postpartum Support

Pennsylvania

Breastfeeding Latinas

Pennsylvania Breastfeeding Coalition

Pretty Mama Breastfeeding LLC

WellSpan York Hospital

Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania

Women's Law Project

Puerto Rico

Alimentacion Segura Infantil

South Carolina

A2Z Lactation, LLC

Clemson University

South Carolina Breastfeeding Coalition

Tennessee

Tennessee Breastfeeding Coalition

Texas

Breastfeeding Perspectives

Parkland Health & Hospital System

Virginia

#757Breastfeeds

Virginia Breastfeeding Advisory Committee

Virginia Breastfeeding Coalition

Washington

Breastfeeding Coalition of Washington

West Virginia

West Virginia Breastfeeding Alliance

Wisconsin

Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Council, Inc.

Green Lake County Department of Health and Harambee Village Douglas

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-health-initiatives/Breastfeeding/Pages/Benefits-of-Breastfeeding.aspx>. Published 2020. Accessed January 22, 2020.

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- ^{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-real-war-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.
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- 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.
- Coronavirus on Households in Rural America*. NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Published 2020. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UYBTE-IZo_XZAdkMUPpnkb3HmQO6ihCO/view. Accessed April 22, 2021.
- Voices From The Field: COVID- 19 & Infant Feeding*. U.S. Breastfeeding Committee; 2020. <http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/d/do/3600>. Accessed April 13, 2021.
- ^{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-disproportionately-harming-black-and-native-women/>. Published 2020. Accessed April 23, 2020.