November 4, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
437 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Committee
2365 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1026 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairwoman Lowey, and Ranking Member Granger:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we write in strong support of increasing the Fiscal Year 2020 funding levels for the WIC Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program to its fully authorized amount of $90 million, as included in the Agriculture/FDA appropriations bill passed by the House of Representatives on June 25, 2019. On October 31, 2019, the Senate advanced a Senate Fiscal Year 2020 Agriculture/FDA Appropriations bill that allocated only $80 million to this critical set-aside. We urge conferees to adopt the House funding level of $90 million.

Breastfeeding promotion and support is a core element of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). WIC’s Breastfeeding Peer Counselor Program, first authorized in 2004 and expanded in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, plays a pivotal role in advancing this mission, providing peer-to-peer support for breastfeeding mothers. The Peer Counselor Program is a proven success, with research demonstrating that peer support improves breastfeeding initiation, duration, and exclusivity among WIC mothers. The program also creates jobs in communities across the country and empowers low-income women to pursue careers in lactation consulting or healthcare.

Both chambers have acted wisely to increase funding for this effective breastfeeding support, but the fully authorized amount of $90 million is needed to meet a program goal of providing peer counselor services in every local agency. Only 53% of pregnant and postpartum women are enrolled in peer counseling and over 30% of local agencies do not have access to a peer counselor at all. Despite this demonstrated need, the Peer Counselor Program has not received a funding increase in nearly a decade, and some states have had to reduce their services as fixed costs increase with inflation.

Funding the Peer Counselor Program at $90 million will not require additional investment in WIC’s overall appropriation or a reduction of the rescission included in both the House and Senate bills. Likewise, funding the Peer Counselor Program at $90 million will not inhibit WIC’s ability to serve current caseload with a total of $6 billion in FY 2020 funding.

We applaud the decision of both chambers to strengthen the investment in WIC’s breastfeeding support and collectively urge conferees to adopt the House funding level of $90 million in the final FY 2020 Agriculture/FDA Appropriations Bill, finally recognizing the full amount authorized under the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.
Sincerely,

National Organizations

1,000 Days
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Advocates for Better Children’s Diets
American Academy of Nursing
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Breastfeeding Institute
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Heart Association
American Public Health Association
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Association of State Public Health Nutritionists
Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric, and Neonatal Nurses
Black Mothers Breastfeeding Association
Bread for the World
Child Care Aware® of America
Childbirth and Postpartum Professional Association
Children’s Health Fund
Children’s HealthWatch
Coalition on Human Needs
Coffective, LLC
First Focus Campaign for Children
Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (IBCLE)
La Leche League Alliance for Breastfeeding Education
La Leche League USA
March of Dimes
Mom2Mom Global
MomsRising
National Alliance for Breastfeeding Advocacy
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Professional and Peer Lactation Supporters of Color
National WIC Association
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nurse-Family Partnership
Pettaway Pursuit Foundation
Reaching Our Sisters Everywhere
RESULTS
Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior
Trust for America’s Health
U.S. Breastfeeding Committee
ZERO TO THREE
Regional and State Organizations

Alabama Breastfeeding Committee
Alaska Breastfeeding Coalition
Appalachian Breastfeeding Network
Arkansas Breastfeeding Coalition
Arizona Breastfeeding Coalition
Breastfeeding Coalition of Delaware
California Breastfeeding Coalition
California WIC Association
Coalition of Oklahoma Breastfeeding Advocates
Healthy and Free Tennessee
Indiana Breastfeeding Coalition
Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition
Kentuckiana Lactation Improvement Coalition
Lactation Improvement Network of Kentucky (LINK)
Maine State Breastfeeding Coalition
Maryland Breastfeeding Coalition
Massachusetts WIC Directors Association
Michigan Breastfeeding Network
Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health
Michigan WIC Association
Minnesota Breastfeeding Coalition
Missouri Breastfeeding Coalition
Missouri WIC Association
Montana Association of WIC Agencies
Nebraska WIC Association
New Hampshire Breastfeeding Task Force
New Jersey Breastfeeding Coalition, Inc.
New Mexico Breastfeeding Task Force
New York Statewide Breastfeeding Coalition, Inc.
Nutrition First
Ohio Breastfeeding Alliance
Pennsylvania Breastfeeding Coalition
Pennsylvania WIC Association
Texas Association of Local WIC Directors (TALWD)
Vermont Breastfeeding Network
Vermont Lactation Consultant Association, Inc.
Virginia Breastfeeding Coalition
Utah WIC Association
WIC Association of New York State, Inc.

Additional State or Local Stakeholders

Acadiana Breastfeeding Coalition
Adagio Health
Allegheny County Breastfeeding Coalition
Aquarian Hands Life Services
Baby Whisperer Lactation Consultants
Balanced Wellness
BASHbyBri
Spectrum Warriors, Inc.
Summit Medical Group
Tarrant County Breastfeeding Coalition
Tri-County Breastfeeding Coalition
Tri-County Health Department
Triangle Health Educators
Twisted Faces LLC
VB Maternity Wellness LLC
Vital Village Network Boston Breastfeeding Coalition
Urban Health Plan, Inc.
Wells Kids
Woman's Choice Charitable Association
Women-Inspired Systems Enrichment
Women's Rights and Empowerment Network

cc: The Honorable John Hoeven
    The Honorable Jeff Merkley
    The Honorable Sanford Bishop
    The Honorable Jeff Fortenberry