July 19, 2013

The Honorable Carol Liu
California Senate
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814


Dear Senator Liu:

On behalf of First 5 LA, I am writing to express our support for SB 252, which would help connect low-income expecting mothers to important pregnancy related benefits such as Paid Family Leave (PFL), and incentivize home visitation services for CalWORKs recipients.

First 5 LA is a child advocacy and grantmaking organization created by California voters to invest Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues in programs for improving the lives of children from prenatal to age 5 in Los Angeles County. First 5 LA champions health, education and safety causes concerning young children and families. Our policy priorities include increasing supports for breastfeeding and expanding voluntary home visiting.

SB 252 would help increase supports for breastfeeding by requiring the state to ensure that expecting mothers in CalWORKs are aware of a number of pregnancy-related public benefits that are available to them. One such benefit is Paid Family Leave (PFL), which has been associated with important advantages for new mothers and their babies. A 2012 paper by the National Center for Children in Poverty emphasized that additional time for mother/infant bonding was associated with a longer duration of breastfeeding among mothers on leave. Research indicates that infants who are breastfed are at substantially lower risk for a host of conditions, including asthma, childhood obesity, Type 2 diabetes, leukemia, and sudden infant death syndrome.

The bill would also enable expecting mothers in CalWORKs to fulfill their welfare-to-work requirements by participating in federally recognized home visitation services. According to the Pew Center, home visitation programs can lead to lower dependency on public services for families, decreased incidents of low birthweight when home visits occur during pregnancy, and higher educational achievement for the children of families that receive these benefits.
July 19, 2013
Page 2

The California Public Health Department, numerous First 5 Commissions, and other state and local partners support voluntary home visiting programs aimed at improving outcomes for pregnant women and parents of young children. In 2013-14 alone, First 5 LA is projected to spend over $25 million on home visitation services.

First 5 LA is in strong support of SB 252 and we look forward to partnering with you to highlight the importance of home visitation services for parents, and Paid Family Leave for its role in encouraging bonding and breastfeeding.

If we can be of further assistance, please contact Tessa Charnofsky, Government Affairs Manager, at TCharnofsky@First5LA.org.

Sincerely,

Kim Belshé
Executive Director

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cc: Assembly Committee on Appropriations
    Western Center on Law and Poverty