June 24, 2013

The Honorable Kevin de León
California Senate
State Capitol, Room 5108
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 402 (de León) Breastfeeding - SUPPORT

Dear Senator de León:

On behalf of First 5 LA, I am writing to express our support of SB 402, which would require all perinatal hospitals in California to implement all Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, as adopted by Baby Friendly USA, by January 1, 2025. Hospitals would have the option to adopt an alternate process including evidenced-based policies and practices and targeted outcomes as well.

First 5 LA is a child advocacy and grantmaking organization created by California voters to invest Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues in health care, early education and child development programs for L.A. County children from the prenatal stage to age 5 and their families.

With the help of funding from First 5 LA, Los Angeles County’s breastfeeding rate at local hospitals has improved to 40 percent, up from 33 percent in 2009 when the First 5 LA Commission approved $10.5 million over five years to support the Baby-Friendly Hospital Project. The program, which also promotes healthy breastfeeding practices through the Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding, increases the practice and duration of breastfeeding by improving policies and staff skills at birthing hospitals.

Studies show that breastfeeding improves health outcomes by reducing a child’s risk for acute infections and sudden infant death syndrome, as well as chronic diseases, including diabetes and obesity. Breastfeeding also strengthens the attachment and bond between mother and child. These protections are strongest when breastfeeding is exclusive—babies receive no foods or fluids other than breast milk—and continuous for the first six months of life.

Breastfeeding success in the hospital is critical during the first 24 to 72 hours of a newborn’s life; support from hospital staff, standards of care, and hospital policies play important roles in determining if a mother will continue to exclusively breastfeed her baby when the family goes home. Exclusive
breastfeeding rates increase when hospitals keep mothers and babies together; promote skin to
skin contact; encourage feeding shortly after birth; provide staff with education for
breastfeeding support; and avoid unnecessary formula supplementation.

SB 402 will help increase breastfeeding rates, while giving maternity hospitals a reasonable
amount of time to become certified as Baby Friendly hospitals or adopt an equivalent process
recognized by the California Department of Public Health. For these reasons, we support the
bill and encourage its immediate passage.

We are grateful for your leadership on this issue, and hope you will consider First 5 LA a
resource in your efforts to move the legislation forward. If we can be of further assistance,
please contact Tessa Charnofsky, Government Affairs Manager, at TCharnofsky@First5LA.org.

Sincerely,

Kim Belshé
Executive Director

KB:rn

cc: California WIC Association fax: (530) 758-7780
Senator Fran Pavley fax: (916) 324-4823
Assembly Health Committee