Dear Assemblymember Mitchell:

On behalf of First 5 LA, I am writing to state our support for AB 1640 (Mitchell), which would allow pregnant women with no other needy children in the household to become eligible for a number of vital services, including CalFresh and full-scope 1931(b) Medi-Cal Managed Care benefits.

First 5 LA oversees the Los Angeles County allocation of funds from Proposition 10, which added a 50-cent tax on tobacco products sold in California. Funds raised help pay for health care, education and child development programs for children from the prenatal stage to age 5 and their families. First 5 LA's mission is to increase the number of young children who are physically and emotionally healthy, safe and ready to learn. For more information, please visit www.First5LA.org. Our goals include promoting public policy that helps ensure that children are born healthy, that there is healthcare coverage for all, and that families with young children, including pregnant women, have access to healthy food options.

Current law in California provides that low-income, pregnant women are eligible to receive pregnancy-only Medi-Cal, a fee-for-service health benefit that provides prenatal care, labor and delivery services, family planning services, and postpartum care. Once a woman becomes eligible for CalWORKs or Cal-Learn in her third trimester, she qualifies for 1931(b)-linked Managed Care Medi-Cal.

AB 1640 allows poor pregnant women access to full-scope Medi-Cal upon verification of their pregnancy rather than waiting for their third-trimester. An earlier transition to full-scope Medi-Cal would provide pregnant mothers with a more continuous and comprehensive health care experience that could significantly improve birth outcomes for low-income, first-time mothers who are at higher risk for premature or low birthweight babies. Full-scope Medi-Cal provides a more comprehensive range of benefits, including preventive care (including exams and vaccinations), vision care, dental care, and mental health services.
Existing federal law also requires all SNAP/CalFresh recipients who are physically and mentally fit to register for employment and participate in the Food Stamp Employment and Training program. This requirement can have the unintended consequence of deterring pregnant women from the program, thus putting them at nutritional risk. If they do not get the nutrients they need for better fetal development, they are at risk for low infant birth weight and other abnormalities. AB 1640 would prohibit denial of CalFresh benefits to pregnant woman or the mandating of participation in a CalFresh employment and training activity at any time after the verification of her pregnancy. This provision would help increase access to healthy and nutritious food for pregnant women.

A comprehensive, uninterrupted system of care and benefits for low income pregnant women is vital to ensuring healthy births in California. For these reasons, we strongly support AB 1640 and urge its immediate passage.

Sincerely,

Craig A. Steele
Interim Chief Executive Officer
First 5 LA

cc: California Assembly and Senate - Los Angeles County delegation