

**FRIENDS OF THE SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR
WOMEN, INFANTS, AND CHILDREN (WIC)
c/o National WIC Association**

October 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 September 19, 2019, the Senate Appropriations Committee 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,

1,000 Days

Advocates for Better Children's Diets

American Academy of Pediatrics

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

American Heart Association

American Public Health Association

Bread for the World

Child Care Aware® of America

Children's HealthWatch

First Focus Campaign for Children

Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)

March of Dimes

MomsRising

National WIC Association

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Nurse-Family Partnership

Reaching Our Sisters Everywhere

Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior

Trust for America's Health

U.S. Breastfeeding Committee

ZERO TO THREE

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