[Date]

The Honorable Jerry Brown
Governor of California
State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Restoration of Funds for the Black Infant Health Program, Department of Public Health – Request for Signature

Dear Governor Brown:

On behalf of [name of organization], I am writing to share our support for the $4 million in restored funding for the Black Infant Health (BIH) Program that was included in SB 852, the Budget Act of 2014. The BIH Program is a vital public health program that aims to reduce the alarming rates of infant mortality for Black infants. We ask that you support the $4 million in state general funds for the Black Infant Health Program and sign the budget package with this funding included.

The BIH Program is unique and fills a critical need in the state. Services are provided in a culturally competent manner and include health education, social support, individualized case management, home visitation and referrals to other needed services. In addition to supporting medical care, the BIH Program more fully addresses all the factors that impact African American mothers, including chronic stress, economic hardship and the need for empowerment. An evaluation conducted by First 5 LA found that compared to African Americans in Los Angeles County overall, participants in the BIH Program had lower rates of preterm births and infant mortality. In Fresno County, the Black infant mortality rate decreased by 69% in the first nine years after the BIH Program was implemented.

Despite this success, there remains a strong need for the BIH Program as health disparities persist for Black infants. The infant mortality rate for Black infants is more than twice the state infant mortality rate for all infants. Rates of preterm birth are highest among births to Black mothers at 13.5%, significantly higher than the 2011 state preterm birth rate of 9.8%.

During the recession, the state general funds for the BIH Program was eliminated in the 2009-10 state budget and federal matching funds were lost when this funding was eliminated. The state general fund cuts had a devastating effect on the local programs as the BIH Program now serves 6,000 fewer women and lost 55 staff throughout California. For example, in Fresno County, from 2007 to 2011, staffing for the program was reduced from 11 employees to two employees and the Black infant mortality rate nearly doubled. Significantly, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties were forced to close their BIH Program sites.

With the $4 million included in the state budget, the BIH Program will be able to serve more women and can lead to reductions in infant mortality, low birth weight and prematurity for Black infants. The average first-year medical costs are nearly ten times greater for preterm ($32,325) than for term infants ($3,325) and the average excess societal economic burden for each infant born preterm is $51,600. Restoring funding for the BIH Program could potentially save $7.9 million in excess societal costs, of which $5.1 million are medical costs for the baby, because of potential reductions in preterm births based on the proven success of the program. Given that 85% of BIH participants are enrolled in Medi-Cal, investments in the BIH Program have the potential of reducing long-term Medi-Cal costs to the state. The BIH Program could also reopen sites in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, which account for 15% of the Black births in the state. Dedicating funding to the BIH Program is a smart investment for the health of families and the fiscal health of our state and fits in well with California's prioritization of funding cost-effective early interventions.

We respectfully request that you include $4 million in state general funds for the BIH Program in the final signed 2014-15 budget. Thank you for your commitment to improving the health of women and children.

Sincerely,

Cc: Lark Park, Office of the Governor
Diana Dooley, Secretary, Health and Human Services Agency
Dr. Ron Chapman, Director, Department of Public Health