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The Honorable Shirley Weber
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
California State Capitol, Room 3126
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support Restoration of Funds for the Black Infant Health Program, Department of Public Health (Budget Item 4265)

Dear Assembly Member Weber:

On behalf of [name of organization], I am writing to share our support for restoring \$3.9 million in funding for the Black Infant Health (BIH) Program. We are encouraged by the committee addressing the BIH Program on your March 3 agenda and ask you to restore this funding in the 2014-15 budget. Thank you for your leadership in prioritizing this vital public health program that aims to reduce the alarming rates of infant mortality for Black infants.

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 Black mothers 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, \$3.9 million in state general funds for the BIH Program was eliminated in the 2009-10 state budget. There were additional cuts in prior years 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 staffing was reduced and fewer women served. 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.

Restoring \$3.9 million in state general funds for the BIH Program will lead to lower costs for delivery, postpartum and infant care. The average first-year medical costs are nearly ten times greater for preterm (\$32,325) than for term infants (\$3,325). 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. Further, the BIH Program fits in well with California's prioritization of funding cost-effective early interventions.

If funding is restored, 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 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 from the state general fund to the BIH Program is a smart investment for the health of families and the fiscal health of our state.

We respectfully request that you restore \$3.9 million in state general funds for the BIH Program in the 2014-15 budget. Thank you for your commitment to improving the health of women and children. We look forward to continuing to work with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Cc: Members of the Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
The Honorable Nancy Skinner, Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
Andrea Margolis, Consultant, Assembly Budget Committee
Dr. Ron Chapman, Director, Department of Public Health

1. Please submit a letter of organizational support for restoring funding for the **BIH Program**. To assist in your efforts, feel free to utilize the attached template BIH funding support letter. Letters of support should be sent to the committee no later than COB on Monday, February 24. Fax numbers for the committee and offices copied on the template letter are:
 - Assembly Budget Committee: 916-319-2199
 - Assembly Member Weber: 916-319-2179
 - Assembly Member Chesbro: 916-319-2102
 - Assembly Member Dickinson: 916-319-2107
 - Assembly Member Grove: 916-319-2134
 - Assembly Member Mansoor: 916-319-2174
 - Assembly Member Skinner: 916-319-2115
 - Department of Public Health: 916-558-1762

2. If you are able to attend the committee hearing, please voice your support in person during public comment. The hearing starts at 4:00 pm in Room 127. A strong in person showing at the hearing is important to support our efforts to get this funding restored.

Feel free to forward this email to other organizations who may be interested in supporting or email me your suggestions and I will follow up. Finally, please share a copy of your letter with me via email and let me know if you plan to attend the March 3 hearing. If you have any questions or need more information, just let me know.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests and for your support to restore funding for the BIH Program!

Justin

Justin Garrett
State Director of Advocacy & Government Affairs

March of Dimes
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