



National Black Nurses Association, Inc.
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October 20, 2023

Members

Pennsylvania House of Representatives

Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives:

On behalf of the National Black Nurses Association, which represents 450,000 Black registered nurses, licensed vocational/practical nurses, nursing students, and retired nurses, including two chapters in Pennsylvania (the Pittsburgh Black Nurses in Action and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Area Black Nurses Association), I am writing regarding SB 500/HB 1111, which provides Medicaid reimbursement for pasteurized donor human milk. Specifically, I am asking you to support an amendment to include Medicaid coverage for donor human milk-derived fortifiers, which are a key element of the medically recommended exclusive human milk diet for premature babies. This amendment would ensure coverage of safe, effective nutrition for the fragile patients we care for in our NICUs.

Our organization was founded in 1971 with the mission “to serve as the voice for Black nurses and diverse populations ensuring equal access to professional development, promoting educational opportunities and promoting health.” Our chapters offer voluntary hours providing health education and screenings to community residents in collaboration with community-based partners, including faith-based organizations, civic, fraternal, hospitals, and schools of nursing.

In our mission of promoting health, we support the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation that breast milk be the sole source of nutrition for the first six months of life as an imperative for all infant’s well-being. For a variety of reasons, however, not all mothers can provide milk to their babies in sufficient quantities, whether due to adoption, surrogacy, or other complications. In these cases, providing donor human milk to the baby is often the best solution for infant health, especially for very low birthweight babies in the NICU, where the need for human milk is highest. The NBNA has long advocated for increased use of donor human milk in hospitals due to the clinical consensus that human milk is the best nutrition for all babies, especially those born premature.¹ This is an issue of key importance to the African American community, which suffers from higher rates of prematurity and concurrently, higher infant mortality. In Pennsylvania specifically, CDC statistics show that African American babies are three times as likely to be born at a very low birthweight babies as white babies, and African American babies account for more than half of Medicaid births under 1,500 grams, the threshold to be considered very low birthweight and at highest risk of complications like necrotizing enterocolitis.² In short, these issues have the greatest impact in the communities NBNA was founded to serve, and we support increasing access to the exclusive human milk diet through Medicaid reimbursement for donor milk.

¹ See: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/national-black-nurses-association-announces-human-donor-milk-resolution-300505510.html>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. National Vital Statistics System, Provisional Natality on CDC WONDER Online Database. Data are from the Natality Records 2023 through Last Month, as compiled from data provided by the 57 vital statistics jurisdictions through the Vital Statistics Cooperative Program. Accessed at <http://wonder.cdc.gov/natality-expanded-provisional.html> on Oct 18, 2023 12:20:59 PM.

However, policymakers have the opportunity to further improve upon SB 500/HB 1111 by including explicit reimbursement for donor human milk-derived human milk fortifiers, which are used across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the country when a vulnerable neonate requires additional nutrition for survival. These specialty products have been clinically shown to promote growth, avoid medical complications, and save money. Prominent associations, such as the Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses, have clearly endorsed these products, stating that “providers should favor human milk fortifiers over bovine-based fortifiers (since) bovine fortifiers do not meet the requirements for exclusive human milk diets.”³ By including coverage for donor human milk-derived human milk fortifiers in SB 500/HB 1111, very low birth weight preemies in Pennsylvania will have access to these life-saving benefits associated with the exclusive human milk diet.

For vulnerable infants, receiving safe, high-quality nutrition is of vital importance. We support amendments to SB 500/HB 1111 that will improve these bills and build on the access and equity they promote by ensuring coverage for the very low birthweight baby’s full exclusive human milk diet, including donor human milk-derived fortifier. I urge you to support such an amendment as you advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sheldon D. Fields". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sheldon D. Fields, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, CRNP, AACRN, FAANP, FNAP, FAAN
President, National Black Nurses Association

³ Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses (2021). The Use of Human Milk During Parent-Newborn Separation. *Nursing for women’s health*, 25(5), e15–e48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nwh.2021.06.001>.