



January 25, 2012

HMHB Response to HR 1124

We appreciate your interest in moms and babies as shown by your recent House Resolution 1124. As you are probably aware, Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia (HMHB) has been advocating for moms and babies for almost 40 years. We are individuals, businesses, healthcare industries, and other non-profit groups with a mission of improving access to care, and thereby improving health outcomes, for the moms and babies of Georgia.

We are so grateful for your interest in this issue! As your resolution notes, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breast milk for babies exclusively for the first six months, at which time food is introduced with the continuation of breast milk and food for the first year of life.

As you know, the health benefits of breast milk, over that of formula, have been proven in many scientific studies. Breast milk reduces infant morbidity and mortality and has a protective effect against later developing obesity and diabetes. It also has a protective effect against breast cancer for moms.

Of course you know the numbers. In Georgia, more than 70% of moms initiate breastfeeding, but only about 10% are still exclusively breastfeeding at six months. We are way off the Healthy People 2020 goal of a breastfeeding rate of 60% at six months.

With over 70% of Georgia's moms initiating breastfeeding at birth, they start off on the right track, but many later give it up when they hit roadblocks and do not have access to the support and assistance that they need. It is a multifaceted problem. As your resolution indicates, there are "familial, cultural, and community issues as well as ... returning to work, medical difficulties, and lack of breastfeeding support."

HMHB is leading an effort to provide the assistance and support that these women need, and you all can help make it happen! We believe that new mothers need access to Internationally Board Certified Lactation Consultants ("IBCLCs") both inside and outside of hospitals (i.e. pediatric offices, home visits, etc.). IBCLCs are clinically trained individuals and have a proven track record of increasing the successes of moms being able to breastfeed and continue breastfeeding. However, it is difficult to attract people into this career path because health insurance companies will not reimburse for their services since

they do not have state licenses. Even the hospitals that have these folks on staff as “loss leaders” have had to cut back on their services because of lack of insurance reimbursement. State licensure would open the doors to jobs and increase the breastfeeding rates in Georgia. It would be a win-win.

State licensure is supported by the Surgeon General, and there are already initiatives in more than 10 states to license IBCLCs. It would be great for Georgia to jump in as a leader in this national effort, especially given that our infant morbidity and mortality are among the worst in the country.

We would love the opportunity to discuss this initiative in more detail with you and have you join our effort to improve the health of our babies and moms in Georgia.

Thanks for all you are doing on behalf of Georgia’s moms and babies.

Sincerely,

Merrilee Aynes Gober, R.N., B.S.N., J.D.
Board President