



National Black Nurses Association, Inc.
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Dr. Martha A. Dawson
President

January 16, 2020

Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy
Virginia General Assembly
Pocahontas Building
900 E. Main Street
Richmond, VA 23219



Dr. (Hon) Millicent Gorham
Executive Director

Dear Delegate Carroll Foy:

I am writing in support of HB 367 and HB 442, ensuring Virginians' most fragile access to safe, high-quality donor human breast milk, including breast milk-based fortifiers. I am writing as President of the Black Nurses Association (NBNA). Organized in 1971, NBNA's mission is to provide a forum for collective action by African American nurses to advocate and implement strategies to ensure access to the highest quality of healthcare for persons of color. Today, NBNA represents the voice of some 200,000 nurses across 113 chapters nationwide, including three in Virginia.

At NBNA, one of the key issues on which we have increasingly focused in recent years is the importance of breast milk, including human donor breast milk and human milk-based fortifiers, for vulnerable infants. Dr. Eric J. Williams, Immediate Past President said in 2017, *"NBNA firmly believes that mother's breast milk is best for babies, providing important nutrients for a healthy baby. It is well documented that women of color have a high rate of preterm babies. There is a need to make sure that premature babies have access to high quality and safe donor milk."*

NBNA is not alone in recognizing the importance of human milk. Our strategic agenda aligns with the American Academy of Pediatrics, which has long recognized the value of breastfeeding and recommends babies feed exclusively on human milk until six months of age. Unfortunately, many babies do not have access to breast milk directly from their mothers, a situation that has led to the development of organized human milk banks. Still, cost remains a barrier to many. The access that your bills will provide to donor human milk will affect babies across both public and private payers, promoting equity in access to best practice care for which NBNA has always fought. In addition, your bill will cover human milk-derived fortifiers for preterm babies in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU), a uniquely vulnerable population that should not be forgotten.

Importantly, your bill also addresses donor milk safety, which is a serious concern for NBNA. In 2017, NBNA passed a human milk safety Resolution (attached) calling for increased regulation of the growing human milk banking industry. Among other things, the Resolution called for “validation of the (human milk) donation that consist(s) of a check for drugs, including nicotine.” HB 367 requires this drug testing for any milk sold in the Commonwealth and establishes a regulatory regime that will help address other quality and safety concerns. These regulations are warranted, especially when one considers the fragile population that receives donor breast milk.

On behalf of NBNA members, thank you for offering these bills, for supporting equal access to needed treatments, and for your commitment to the safety and quality of the donor milk supply.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martha A. Dawson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Martha A. Dawson, DNP, RN, FACHE
President