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**Testimony to the Human Services Committee regarding  
House Bill 7165 An Act Concerning Medicaid Coverage for Donor Breast Milk  
February 28, 2019**

Dear members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share the following testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition in favor of AN ACT CONCERNING MEDICAID COVERAGE FOR DONOR BREAST MILK. I support this proposed legislation because of the positive impact providing Medicaid coverage of donor milk will have on Connecticut's mothers and babies.

The Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition is a nonprofit organization whose mission is *to improve Connecticut's health by working collaboratively to protect, promote and support breastfeeding*. We work to assure access to lactation care and services, promote breastfeeding as a normal and preferred method of feeding, and to protect, promote and support breastfeeding mothers. This includes, but is not limited to, providing expertise and support of education, evidence-based best practices, and legislation.

Human milk is the most natural and beneficial source of nutrition for babies, especially for premature, high-risk infants. In preterm infants, human milk feeding is associated with lower risks of several life-threatening diseases, including necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC)<sup>1</sup>. However, breastfeeding from birth shows even better infant health outcomes against NEC, mothers of preterm infants, especially infants of low birth rates, are met with unexpected challenges to initial breastfeeding. These challenges may be related to maternal stress, disability, and inadequate milk supply.

Preterm birth disproportionately affects women of color. In the March of Dimes' 2016 Premature Birth Report Card, Connecticut received a C-grade for its 9.4% overall preterm birth rate. The report card demonstrates significant racial/ethnic disparities in preterm births (e.g., 12.2% of all preterm births by black women in the state compared to 8.6% among white women). The inherent health risks of premature birth, coupled with well-documented disparities in income and education among families of color, support the need to invest in the best nutrition – donor breast milk – from the start.

**Providing Medicaid coverage for donor breast milk can result in improved infant growth rates, lower infant morbidity and mortality rates, reduced health disparities, and cost-savings.**

The Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition is willing to lend its expertise to working with the Human Services Committee on this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

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<sup>1</sup> Kantorowska, A., Wei, J.C., Cohen, R.S., Lawrence, R.A, Gould, J.B., Lee, H.C. (2016, March ). Impact of Donor Milk Availability on Breast Milk Use and Necrotizing Enterocolitis Rates. *Pediatrics*, 137(3), 1-8. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2015-3123.