

NATIONAL PERINATAL ASSOCIATION URGES THE PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATURE TO INCLUDE MEDICAID COVERAGE FOR AN EXCLUSIVE HUMAN MILK DIET IN SB 500/HB 1111

Research shows morbidity for the most vulnerable infants is greatly reduced with an exclusive human milk diet

Bourbon, Missouri October 25, 2023



The National Perinatal Association (NPA), a national multidisciplinary perinatal education and advocacy group, today renewed their call for members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to amend SB 500/HB 1111 and ensure Medicaid coverage includes access to an exclusive human milk diet for fragile infants.

“An exclusive human milk diet is critical to the health, survival and equity of our most vulnerable newborns that spend their first days of life in the NICU,” said Kristy Love, Executive Director of the National Perinatal Association. “Human milk derived fortifiers are clinically proven to decrease illness and complications in ways that no other food source can for fragile preemies and the Legislature has the opportunity to support neonatologists statewide by amending SB 500. With passage, the Commonwealth’s parents will no longer have to worry if their preemies are getting the nutrition and sustenance they need to grow stronger and healthier.”

In September, the NPA sent a letter to Health Committee Chairs Frankel, Rapp, Brooks, and Haywood, the NPA urging Legislators to support key provisions for SB 500 PN 484 and HB 1111 PN 1307 while in committee.

“Human milk derived fortifiers should be provided to extremely low birth weight premature babies,” reads the letter. “Research shows that mortality and morbidity for the most vulnerable infants is reduced when they are fed an exclusive human milk diet. Necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) is the leading cause of death in premature infants. Using human milk derived fortifier reduces the mortality rate to around 1%.”

This issue is critically important because for very low birthweight (VLBW) babies born as early as 22 weeks, their intestines are one of the last organs to develop. Therefore, they are unable to digest foreign proteins, such as cow’s milk, and parents rely on human milk as a singular food source. Fortifier, a nutritional supplement that is added to milk, is required to provide adequate nutrition for these infants and comes in two forms: human milk-derived or bovine-derived (cow’s milk). Research shows that when human milk-derived fortifier is used for fragile babies, the risk of NEC, sepsis, and other complications is greatly reduced.

According to 2021 CDC data (see *citation*), Black babies in Pennsylvania were three times as likely to be very low birthweight babies than white babies. Further, preterm infants born VLBW account for a disproportionate number of neonatal deaths. The most common cause of death among VLBW babies is NEC, which can only be prevented by ensuring babies do not consume foreign protein (ie cow's milk) prior to their intestines being fully developed, and why coverage for human milk-derived human milk fortifier is so critical.

“No parent should have to worry about their baby developing a devastating condition which can be nearly eliminated by avoiding cow’s milk,” the letter continues. “Coverage of human milk-derived human milk fortifiers in the Commonwealth would also reduce disparities in access to the best and most cost-effective treatment for the state’s most vulnerable babies... Please do the right thing for preemie infants: amend SB 500 PN 484 or HB 1111 PN 1307 to include coverage for human derived-human milk fortifiers. This will give our most vulnerable and fragile babies the best chance possible to live.”

Beyond the health benefits, multiple national, independent studies have shown that human milk-derived human milk fortifiers reduce the time premature infants spend in NICUs – with savings ranging from \$307,916 to \$2,520,000 per institution annually.

Similar legislation has already been passed in other states, including New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Florida, Kentucky, and Illinois.

Click here to read the full letter.



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The National Perinatal Association is an interdisciplinary organization of professionals, parents, students, and advocates. We bring together people who are interested in perinatal care to share, to listen, and to learn from each other. We are building a community where all voices are heard with equity and respect as we work to improve perinatal care - together.

