May 16, 2014

Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Levin and Senator Inhofe:

We write to urge you to include Senator McCaskill's bill, the TRICARE Moms Improvement Act of 2014 (S. 1994), in the FY 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This legislation would require the TRICARE program to cover breastfeeding support, supplies and counseling for breastfeeding mothers in military families, including women in the uniformed services and women who are military dependents. This legislation would ensure that military families have breastfeeding coverage that is similar to the coverage provided in most private health plans. Most importantly, this improvement would support these women's efforts to successfully breastfeed and enable women and their infants to benefit from the positive health outcomes related to breastfeeding.

According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), breastfeeding reduces children's risk for a variety of common childhood illnesses and less frequent but serious conditions, including sudden infant death syndrome, ear infections, upper and lower respiratory disease, asthma, childhood leukemia, childhood obesity and Type 2 diabetes. It also reduces maternal risk for breast and ovarian cancer. Based on this and other research, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Academy of Pediatrics support exclusive breastfeeding for approximately six months, with continuation of breastfeeding, if possible, even longer.

Most pregnant women in the United States intend to breastfeed their infants and initiate breastfeeding at birth, but the majority of these women stop breastfeeding while their child is still an infant. For example, the National Immunization Survey of 2009 found that 76 percent of new mothers began breastfeeding, with 47 percent continuing to breastfeed at 6 months, and only 26 percent breastfeeding at 12 months. Results from a 2004 study of military women were comparable, with 51 percent of mothers breastfeeding at 6 months, and 25 percent at 12 months.

The Institute of Medicine has identified gaps in skilled support and instruction in breastfeeding and limited breastfeeding supports for women returning to work, including access to breast pumps, as critical factors influencing whether a new mother initiates breastfeeding and the duration of breastfeeding. This legislation would make such skilled support and instruction, and access to breast pumps, available to mothers in military families.

We appreciate your attention to this important issue and urge inclusion of S. 1994 as part of the NDAA.

Sincerely,

American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
National Women's Law Center
American Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Nursing
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Birth Centers
American Association of University Women
American Civil Liberties Union
American College of Nurse-Midwives
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Nurses Association
American Public Health Association
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Breast Cancer Action Network
Business and Professional Women's Foundation
California WIC Association
Centering Healthcare Institute
Children's Hospital Association
Clearing House on Women's Issues
Community Action Partnership
Doctors for America
First Focus
Greater Hudson Valley Family Health Center
Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America
Institute for Human and Science Values
Maine Women's Health Campaign
March of Dimes
Maryland Women's Coalition for Health Care Reform
MomsRising
Montana Women Vote
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Jewish Women
National Health Law Program
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Partnership for Women and Families

National WIC Association
North Carolina Justice Center
National Women's Health Network
Ovarian Cancer National Alliance
Physicians for Reproductive Health
Reproductive Health Technologies Project
Service Women's Action Network
Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine
Strategies for a Strong Economy
Take Action Minnesota
West Virginia Free
Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health
Wisconsin Association for Perinatal Health
Women's Law Project

cc: Honorable Jack Reed
Honorable Bill Nelson
Honorable Claire McCaskill
Honorable Mark Udall
Honorable Kay R. Hagan
Honorable Joe Manchin III
Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Honorable Kirsten E. Gillibrand
Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Honorable Joe Donnelly
Honorable Mazie K. Hirono
Honorable Tim Kaine
Honorable Angus King
Honorable John McCain
Honorable Jeff Sessions
Honorable Saxby Chambliss
Honorable Roger F. Wicker
Honorable Kelly Ayotte
Honorable Deb Fischer
Honorable Lindsey Graham
Honorable David Vitter
Honorable Roy Blunt
Honorable Mike Lee
Honorable Ted Cruz