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**SENATOR KEVIN DE LEÓN FIGHTS FOR BREASTFEEDING EQUITY**  
Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative to Improve Health Outcomes

**SACRAMENTO** – Giving economically disadvantaged infants a fighting start to life, the California WIC Association is pleased to announce Senator Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles) has introduced Senate Bill 402, legislation helping disintegrate barriers for babies and mothers.

SB 402 will require all California perinatal hospitals by January 1, 2020 to implement “Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding,” as adopted by Baby Friendly USA per the [Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative](#). Hospitals would have the option to adopt an equivalent process recognized by the California Department of Public Health. Senator Fran Pavley (D-Agoura Hills) has signed on as a co-author.

“Low-income women and children are experiencing grave health inequities,” said Senator De León. “I am proud to introduce SB 402 because all mothers who go into the hospital wanting to breastfeed should be given the same opportunities for success no matter their zip code.”

A growing body of evidence indicates that early infant feeding practices can affect a child’s long-term growth and development. Children breastfed as babies are less likely to become overweight and obese. Breastfeeding reduces a baby’s risk of asthma, ear infections, and other illness, and may lower the risk of diabetes and certain cancers. The risk of breast and ovarian cancer and osteoporosis is lower for breastfeeding mothers, too. These protections are strongest when breastfeeding is exclusive—babies receive no foods or fluids other than breast milk—and continuous for the first six months of life.

A [2010 Harvard study](#) found that the United States would save \$13 billion per year if 90 percent of infants were breastfed exclusively for six months.

Though more than 90 percent of California mothers make the decision to exclusively breastfeed their babies, nearly 40 percent of them don’t during their hospital stay. Breastfeeding success in the hospital is critical during the first 24 to 72 hours of a baby’s life; support from hospital staff, standards of care, and hospital policies play important roles in determining if a mother will continue to exclusively breastfeed her baby when the family goes home.

Studies have shown that hospital practices can have a dramatic impact on breastfeeding rates. Exclusive breastfeeding rates increase when hospitals keep mothers and babies together; promote skin to skin contact; encourage feeding shortly after birth; provide staff with education for breastfeeding support; and avoid unnecessary formula supplementation.

In 2011, the California WIC Association (CWA) and UC Davis Human Lactation Center ranked California's lowest-scoring hospitals with exclusive breastfeeding rates. Good Samaritan Hospital in Los Angeles, within Senator De León's district, is the tenth lowest-scoring hospital in the state. With almost 4,000 births, only about 30 percent of newborns are exclusively breastfed.

A disproportionate number of California hospitals which have low or very low exclusive breastfeeding rates are in areas which serve low income women of color. The health effects are evident; children in these zip codes experience far more health issues than those born in Baby-Friendly hospitals.

"California WIC Association believes that it is critical to move hospitals forward to fully implement the 'Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding.' The Ten Steps will increase exclusive breastfeeding rates in California, improve health outcomes for moms and kids, and ultimately save millions in unnecessary health care costs," states Laurie True, CWA Executive Director. She goes on to say, "This bill will address a glaring health inequity: all babies deserve a chance to get the best start in life by breastfeeding, no matter what hospital they happen to be born in."

Of the approximate 260 perinatal hospitals in California, 58 are certified as "Baby Friendly," a process which takes at least a few years to complete. While approximately 40 hospitals are planning to begin the certification process, nearly 162 perinatal hospitals still must become certified. SB 402 will allow those hospitals ample time, until 2020, to complete the process.

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The SB 402 background sheet can be found on the Senator's website:

<http://sd22.senate.ca.gov/sites/sd22.senate.ca.gov/files/SB402%20Background%20Sheet.pdf>.

CWA's Fact Sheet and the bill text are linked at <http://calwic.org/policy-center/state>.

For more info, or to set up an interview, contact: Karen Farley or other CWA staff at (530)750-2280, or Greg Hayes (Senator Kevin de León's office) at (916) 812-3122 or [greg.hayes@sen.ca.gov](mailto:greg.hayes@sen.ca.gov).

*The California WIC Association is a non-profit state wide association whose members educate local, state and federal policymakers about the WIC Program and advocate for WIC reforms, funding, and improvements. With an advocacy presence in both Washington and Sacramento, CWA also takes positions on wider policies and legislation that impacts local WIC providers, WIC families and the low-income communities WIC serves. CWA has worked with UC Davis for several years to publish annual reports which analyze and rank California Department of Public Health hospital breastfeeding data with policy recommendations. For the report, and state and county fact sheets: <http://www.calwic.org/focus-areas/breastfeeding/hospital-rates-a-reports>*