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Association of Ontario
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Association of Public Health
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Health Promotion Ontario:
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Public Health Research, Education and
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Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001

February 23, 2007

Shelley Martel
NDP Health Critic
Room 112, West Wing
Main Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON, M7A 1A5

Dear Ms. Martel,

On behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), I am writing to express our sincere appreciation for your attention to the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding in our province. The OPHA represents the interests of more than 3,000 community and public health practitioners across Ontario. The mission of the OPHA is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health, and to strengthen the impact of people who are active in public and community health throughout Ontario. The Breastfeeding Promotion Workgroup of the OPHA focuses on the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding.

In particular we would like to acknowledge your efforts to encourage the government to develop and implement a provincial breastfeeding strategy based on the principles of the WHO/UNICEF *Baby-Friendly™ Initiative (BFI)*, as reflected in your comments and questions during the Standing Committee on Estimates for the Ministry of Health Promotion on September 5, 2006.

Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months with continuation for two years or beyond is the provincial, national and internationally endorsed best practice recommendation. This recommendation is based on extensive research documenting diverse and compelling advantages of breastfeeding for infants, mothers, families, and society. Of note is the mounting evidence related to the role of breastfeeding in the prevention of childhood obesity, a current priority for Ontario health initiatives. (See the attached summary entitled, *Breastfeeding as a Key Strategy for the Prevention of Obesity*).

The WHO/UNICEF *Baby-Friendly™ Initiative (BFI)* is a global program of evidence-based standards and policy recommendations which have been documented to positively impact breastfeeding initiation and duration rates around the world. The BFI has been implemented in over 20,000 hospitals and community services worldwide, but only seven in Canada (five in Quebec; one hospital and one public health department in Ontario). The BFI is endorsed by the OPHA, Health Canada, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) and many other health organizations in our province and country.

The OPHA would like to thank you again for your time and attention to supporting breastfeeding, in particular your focus on the importance of implementing the *Baby-Friendly™ Initiative* in Ontario, as a proven strategy for improving breastfeeding rates. Your assistance in bringing this issue to the attention of the appropriate government officials is greatly appreciated. Please feel free to contact us to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,

Dr. Garry Aslanyan
President