Legislation Text

File #: 2026-0723, **Version:** 1

To: County of Sonoma Board of Supervisors
Department or Agency Name(s): Department of Health Services
Staff Name and Phone Number: Nolan Sullivan, 707-565-4774; Amelyn Olson, 707-565-2696; Aileen Rodriguez, 707-565-6598
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Recommended Action:
Adopt a Gold Resolution reaffirming Sonoma County's commitment to breastfeeding awareness and continued efforts to support breastfeeding in Sonoma County.

Executive Summary:
The Department of Health Services, through their Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health and Women, Infants and Children programs promotes exclusive breastfeeding (along with the appropriate introduction of solid foods) for two years or longer, as desired by the mother and infant. The Department seeks approval of a resolution reaffirming Sonoma County's commitment to breastfeeding promotion and awareness and equitable access to breastfeeding support in Sonoma County. This action will continue efforts to reduce health disparities for breastfeeding mothers and infants, particularly among low-income and Spanish speaking communities. Breastfeeding provides babies, mothers, families, and the community unique health, economic, and societal benefits.

Discussion:
The Department of Health Services (hereafter "the Department" or "DHS"), through their Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health and Women, Infants and Children programs promotes exclusive breastfeeding (along with the appropriate introduction of solid foods) for two years or longer, as desired by the mother and infant. This is an effective prevention strategy to increase protective factors and reduce the risk of obesity among women and their children. While Sonoma County's breastfeeding rates continue to trend above average with strong advocacy and support from the health sector, barriers still exist for the low-income and Spanish speaking populations. Increased access to support for exclusive breastfeeding is necessary to continue to reap the unique health, economic, and societal benefits that breastfeeding provides to babies, mothers, families, and the community.

Overwhelming evidence shows breast milk provides optimal nutrition for infants, and breastfeeding offers the best health outcomes for both infants and mothers. Medical professionals, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, along with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization, recommend that infants receive only breastmilk for the first six months and continue to breastfeed up to at least two years of age with the addition of appropriate foods. As the past Executive Director for UNICEF James Grant said, "Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months goes a long way toward canceling out the health differences between being born into poverty and being born into affluence."

Breast milk offers many benefits for a child's health. It is the perfect first food for babies' growth and brain development; and it protects babies against diarrhea, constipation, allergies, asthma, cancer, diabetes, ear infections, tooth decay, and sudden infant death syndrome. Among its other well-documented benefits, breastfeeding reduces risk of obesity. Experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate breastfeeding could help to reduce national obesity rates by up to 20 percent.

Breastfeeding is considered a "Life Course Indicator" as it is a behavior tied to a critical or sensitive time that impacts a mother and baby's lifelong health trajectory. Over the course of a life, the risks of not breastfeeding include increased incidence of several common childhood illnesses and chronic conditions such as obesity, asthma, and certain cancers. Not breastfeeding is also associated with an increased risk of disease for mothers, including breast cancer, ovarian cancer, type II diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

The benefits of breastfeeding are dose related so that the longer a woman breastfeeds, the greater protection she receives. Women whose total lifetime breastfeeding is 6 to 12 months were 10 percent less likely to develop heart disease. In addition, research estimates that upwards of $18.5 billion in health care and premature death-related expenses could be saved each year if 90 percent of women were to meet breastfeeding recommendations. Employers that provide workplace lactation support experience an impressive return on investment, including lower health care costs, absenteeism, and job satisfaction.

Breastfeeding provides a safe, reliable, and renewable food source, especially critical during natural disasters and emergency situations, such as the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

The Department's Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program won the USDA Loving Support Award of Excellence in 2015, 2020, and 2021 for providing exemplary breastfeeding support. In 2025, the department's WIC program was one out of three agencies in the nation awarded the highly prestigious Elite Level Breastfeeding Award of Excellence.

The Department's WIC program also has taken a lead role in Sonoma County in promoting the importance of breastfeeding to community partners, through leading the Sonoma County Breastfeeding Coalition in its collaborative work to ensure all low-income women and babies have the support they need to exclusively breastfeed as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. WIC provides equitable access to support and resources to increase breastfeeding rates among populations that experience lower breastfeeding rates due to various structural barriers. Together we are creating a sustainable system of care that supports breastfeeding in vulnerable families from birth through the postpartum period and beyond.

The Healthy Apple Program, administered by the Community Child Care Council (4Cs) of Sonoma County the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, collaborates closely with daycare providers in Sonoma County to support breastfeeding within daycare settings. 60% of mothers stop breastfeeding earlier than they want to, but the more breastfeeding support a mother receives from her daycare provider the more likely she will continue to breastfeed her baby. Through Healthy Apple, daycare providers receive comprehensive training on establishing welcoming breastfeeding environments and maintaining proper breast milk storage protocols. By equipping providers with knowledge and resources, the program ensures that breastfeeding mothers feel empowered and supported when entrusting their children to daycare facilities. Through these concerted efforts, the Healthy Apple Program not only enhances the quality of childcare but also contributes to the promotion of maternal and infant health in Sonoma County.

Additionally, the Department's Maternal-Child Home Visiting Programs (Nurse-Family Partnership, Teen Parent Connections, and Trauma-Informed Approach in Public Health Nursing) play a significant role in promoting breastfeeding among enrolled clients. With support from public health nurses, social workers, and community

health workers, participants in home visiting programs are able to meet and exceed their breastfeeding goals. Over the past year, more than 55% of participants in home visiting programs breastfed their children until at least 6 months of age.

This gold resolution solidifies our commitment to community support and awareness and issues a call to action to continue efforts to support breastfeeding in Sonoma County.

Prior Board Actions:
Resolutions acknowledging the importance of breastfeeding awareness and support have been adopted for many years, most recently on July 22, 2025.

FISCAL SUMMARY
Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:
None

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):
None

Attachments:
Attachment 1 - Resolution

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:
None