



Children's Trust Fund

Strengthening Families in Massachusetts

June 3, 2013

The Honorable Jeffrey Sanchez, House Chair
Joint Committee on Public Health
State House
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Board of the Children's Trust Fund, I write today in strong support of HB 2103, An Act Relative to Folic Acid Awareness and Birth Defects Prevention, sponsored by Representative Aaron Vega. This bill would increase public awareness of and education on the importance of folic acid to patients, families and health care providers by codifying current folic acid efforts at the MA Department of Public Health (DPH).

Studies have shown that sufficient folic acid in women's diets before and during pregnancy can prevent birth defects of the brain and spinal cord known as neural tube defects (NTD's), the most serious birth defects, by up to 70%.

The March of Dimes found that while public awareness is improving, most women of childbearing age do not know the benefits of folic acid. Although 84% have heard of folic acid, only 19% take a daily vitamin containing it. Only 20% know that folic acid prevents birth defects, and only 11% know it should be taken before pregnancy. The March of Dimes found that 49% of these women learned about folic acid from the media, and only 33% from health care providers.

Here in Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), a collaborative project between the Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, reported that in 2012 only 38% of mothers reported taking multivitamins every day of the week in the month before becoming pregnant and 48% reported never taking them during that time; and that Black non-Hispanics, those with less than a high school education, Hispanics, those living at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Line, or those under 20, were the least likely to take multivitamins every day.

This bill:

- ❖ Codifies current efforts at the Department of Public Health (DPH) to ensure they continue to administer folic acid awareness initiatives.
- ❖ Ensures DPH considers efforts to promote women receive the following daily recommended dosage levels of folic acid: 400 micrograms (mcg) for women of childbearing age; 600 (mcg) for women during pregnancy.

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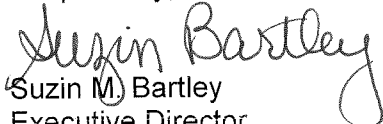
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- ❖ Ensures DPH consults with statewide maternal and child health organizations and various state programs, including MassHealth, to promote folic acid awareness.
- ❖ Imposes NO additional responsibility on DPH.
- ❖ Requires NO additional appropriation to DPH.

Thank you for your time and attention to this legislation. If you have any questions or require further explanation please do not hesitate to call Maureen Ferris, Public Policy Director at 617-502-8733 or maureen.ferris@state.ma.us.

Respectfully,


Suzin M. Bartley
Executive Director