



David Stewart, MSP

cc. Alison Thewliss, MP and chair of the APPG on Infant Feeding and Inequalities

By email

March 11th 2021

Dear Mr Stewart,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Baby Feeding Law Group-UK, an association of 28 health professional organisations and NGOs who work together to protect infant feeding in the UK. You can find out more about us at www.bflg-uk.org. Our goal is to see the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and all subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions ('the Code') incorporated into UK law.

A BFLG member has shared with us an invitation she received to a webinar titled 'A discussion on a new report from BSNA on enabling informed decision making and respecting parent choices in infant feeding' which will take place on Friday the 19th of March, and for which you will be the chair. The report title is 'Parent and Baby Friendly: Enabling Informed Decision Making and Respecting Parent Choices in Infant Feeding'.

Firstly, in case you are not already aware, the concept of 'baby friendly' is already associated with the Unicef-led, government endorsed initiative which you can find more about here: [The Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative](#). This initiative is part of a wider global partnership between the World Health Organization and Unicef and focuses on enabling public services to better support families with feeding and developing close, loving relationships, ensuring that all babies get the best possible start in life. As the BSNA is the trade association representing manufacturers of breastmilk substitutes in the UK it strikes us as highly inappropriate of them to co-opt the term 'baby friendly'. And related to this, for the BSNA to commission a report and lead a discussion on infant feeding creates obvious conflicts of interest. The primary concern of their members is to sell their products. For that reason they have no place influencing government policy or the practice of health care professionals.

The UK government is a signatory to the WHO Code, which aims to protect the health of women, infants and young children. The Code and resolutions exist to stop the inappropriate marketing of infant formula and any milks, drinks or foods that are specifically marketed for feeding

Baby Feeding Law Group UK Members:

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers (ABM), Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services (AIMS), Baby Milk Action, Best Beginnings, Breastfeeding Network (BfN), Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA), Doula UK, The Fatherhood Institute, First Steps Nutrition Trust, GP Infant Feeding Network (GPIFN), HENRY, Hospital Infant Feeding Network (HIFN), Human Milk Foundation, Institute of Health Visiting, Lactation Consultants GB (LCGB), La Leche League GB (LLLGB), Leicester Mammias, Local Infant Feeding Information Board (LIFIB), Midwives Information and Resource Service (MIDIRS), National Breastfeeding Helpline, NCT, Royal College of Midwives (RCM), Save the Children, UK Association of Milk Banking (UKAMB), Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative, Unison, Women's Environmental Network (WEN), and World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative.

Secretariat: vicky@firststepsnutrition.org.



infants and young children up to the age of 3 years, as well as bottles and teats. The Code and resolutions are integral to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

WHA resolution 69.9 states that sponsorship of meetings of health professionals by the breastmilk substitute industry, such as this webinar you plan to chair (which will undoubtedly attract health professionals), should not be allowed. Health professionals working in Unicef UK Baby Friendly accredited settings work within the Code and staff in these settings avoid industry funded meetings as part of their commitment to protecting breastfeeding. Events such as this webinar are a highly effective mechanism for companies to circumvent workplace controls on company representatives' access to health workers. However, sponsorship ultimately serves to promote the company's brands and products by association.

The UK has the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world, and this has enormous implications for the physical and mental health and well-being of mothers and their children. The current COVID-19 pandemic makes this situation more concerning than ever. The promotion of breastmilk substitutes has been highlighted as causative in undermining breastfeeding. Added to which, companies have been capitalising on the pandemic in their marketing efforts.

Within the UK we are working hard to ensure that all families are supported with appropriate advice on infant and young child feeding in order that they can make informed decisions about how they would like to feed their children. We do this through programmes such as Unicef Baby Friendly and through national and local actors and activities that are independent of commercial involvement. The companies that the BSNA represent all violate the WHO Code in the UK and globally, as highlighted by the investigations of many independent organisations and researchers over the years; see: [The Code — Baby Feeding Law Group UK \(bflg-uk.org\)](http://The Code — Baby Feeding Law Group UK (bflg-uk.org))

For the reasons outlined above, we are writing to you to urge you to reconsider chairing this meeting. We can only tackle existing health and social inequalities and achieve optimal health outcomes for children and their mothers if we all work together to give consistent, independent information to our esteemed health professionals and policy makers.

If you would like to discuss any of these issues further, or find out any more about the BFLG-UK, do please get in touch with me at vicky@firststepsnutrition.org.

Yours sincerely

Dr Victoria Sibson

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