



American Public Health Association

Working for a Healthier World

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May 16, 2006

Governor Mitt Romney
State House, Room 360
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Romney:

On behalf of the American Public Health Association (APHA), the oldest, largest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world, dedicated to protecting all Americans and their communities from preventable, serious health threats and assuring community-based health promotion and disease prevention activities and preventive health services are universally accessible in the United States, I am writing to urge you to reconsider your position on formula marketing in hospitals. Contrary to your public comments, the Public Health Council Regulation does not affect a woman's right to choose formula feeding. It simply removes marketing campaigns that target new mothers from our state's hospitals.

The science to support breastfeeding is clear, as is the science to support the negative impact of marketing to new mothers. A scientific analysis in 2000 of previously published studies found that women who got gift bags were less likely to exclusively breast-feed. Since the early 1970's APHA has been on record, consistently supporting international promotion of breastfeeding and the WHO/UNICEF Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. Pharmaceutical companies sell about 80% of the baby formula in the US, and they rely on doctors and nurses to endorse their brand by distributing discharge "diaper bags" in hospitals. Multiple studies show that breastfeeding mothers are more likely to start using formula if they take home a bag-- even if the bag doesn't contain formula.

Formula feeding is linked to myriad health problems, from breast cancer in mothers to childhood obesity. Obesity rates in Massachusetts have increased 80 percent in the last 15 years – our state's hospitals should not promote a product that may make it worse. Research shows that children who are not breastfed have higher health care costs, resulting in increased Medicaid expenditures. Research also shows their parents miss more time from work to care for sick children, resulting in decreased economic productivity.

We see this as also a consumer protection issue. This marketing strategy starts babies on a product that costs formula-feeding families more than \$700 a year above store brands. Formula marketing in hospitals targets young consumers and aims to establish brand and product loyalty at the expense of public health. The U.S. Government Accountability Office has

condemned this practice of hospital-based marketing. The Massachusetts Public Health Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Massachusetts Medical Society, among others, all oppose hospital-based formula marketing. We join with our colleagues in urging you to protect the public health and reverse your position on formula marketing in hospitals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Georges" and last name "Benjamin" clearly distinguishable.

Georges Benjamin, MD, FACP
Executive Director