June 7, 2016

The Hon. Jane Philpott  
70 Colombine Driveway,  
Tunney’s Pasture  
Postal Location: 0906C  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9  
Hon.Jane.Philpott@Canada.ca

Dear Minister Philpott:

Re: Legislation for the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitute

On May 27, 2016 at a regular meeting of the Board for the Grey Bruce Health Unit, the Board considered the attached letter from the Peterborough County-City Health Unit regarding the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitute (The Code) and requesting your government to advocate for legislation for the Code in Canada. The following motion was passed:

Motion No: 2016-51

Moved by: David Shearman  
Seconded by: Mike Smith

“That, the Board of Health does endorse the correspondence from Peterborough County-City Health Unit regarding legislation for the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitute.”

Carried.

Sincerely,

Hazel Lynn MD, FCFP, MHSc  
Medical Officer of Health
Cc:  The Right Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada  
Dr. Gregory W. Taylor, Chief Public Health Officer, Public Health Agency of Canada  
Larry Miller, MP Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound  
Benn Lobb, MP Huron-Bruce  
Kellie Leitch, MP Simcoe-Grey  
Bill Walker, MPP Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound  
Lisa Thompson, MPP Huron-Bruce  
Jim Wilson, MPP Simcoe-Grey  
Association of Local Public Health Agencies  
Ontario Boards of Health

Encl.
April 27, 2016

The Hon. Jane Philpott  
70 Colombine Driveway,  
Tunney’s Pasture  
Postal Location: 0906C  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9  
Hon.Jane.Philpott@Canada.ca

Dear Minister Philpott:

On behalf of the Board of Health for the Peterborough County-City Health Unit, I am writing to express our concern about formula industry violations of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitute (the Code), and to request that your government advocate for legislation of the Code in Canada.

The aim of the Code is to protect optimal health outcomes for infants through breastfeeding, and support appropriate use of breastmilk substitutes (i.e., baby formula). The Code focuses attention on how the infant formula industry influences consumers to support the use of breastmilk substitutes, thereby undermining maternal and child health. Violations of the Code in Canada are rampant, and easily spotted: targeting women purchasing maternity wear; advertisements in pregnancy and parenting magazines; invitations to mothers to sign up for “baby clubs” from which they receive free samples or coupons for formula. Even more concerning are Code violations through the health care system, including provision of free formula to health care facilities.

Our public health agency is committed to protecting and supporting breastfeeding as outlined in the Ontario Public Health Standards, and has achieved the World Health Organization’s Baby Friendly designation, a best practice in infant feeding. Despite this commitment, local surveillance data indicates that while more than 90% of local mothers initiate breastfeeding, more than half of all local babies have received at least one formula supplement by the time they are two weeks old. These statistics speak to the normalization of formula feeding, and the effectiveness of the industry in undermining a mother’s intention to breastfeed.

Despite Canada’s adoption of the Code, there is currently no legislation in place to ensure that industry complies with the Code provisions. Such legislation would be an asset, given the important role of breastfeeding in maternal and child health, and the inability of industry to voluntarily adhere to this ethical framework.
In closing, I ask that Canada’s commitment to maternal and child health, and the Code be honoured by legislation of the Code in Canada.

Yours in health,

*Original signed by*

Scott McDonald  
Chair, Board of Health

cc: The Right Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada  
Dr. Gregory W. Taylor, Chief Public Health Officer, Public Health Agency of Canada  
Maryam Monsef, MP, Peterborough-Kawartha  
Kim Rudd, MP, Northumberland-Peterborough South  
Jamie Schmale, MP, Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock  
Association of Local Public Health Agencies  
Ontario Boards of Health