

16 March 2017

Honourable Members of the Legislative Council  
Legislative Council  
Hong Kong SAR

Re: Hong Kong Code of Marketing of Formula Milk and Related Products, and Food Products for Infants & Young Children (HK Code)

Members of the Alliance for Children's Commission urge Honourable Members of the Legislative Council to support the immediate launch of the HK Code.

The Department of Health started drafting the HK Code in 2010 to regulate the aggressive marketing of formula milk for infants and the cross promotion through marketing of formula milk for young children. After numerous consultations of stakeholders during the drafting process and an extensive public consultation that concluded in 2013, the HK Code has yet to be implemented. This should be delayed no longer.

It is well recognised that breastfeeding is important for the short and long term health of children and their mothers in both developed and developing countries<sup>1</sup>. Healthcare and economic cost savings are substantial<sup>2</sup>. In 2016, a World Health Assembly resolution called for the ending of inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children<sup>3</sup>. A clear guidance was also published at the same time by WHO on how to implement the resolution including no promotion of “products that function as breast-milk substitutes” “marketed for feeding of infants and young children up to the age of 3 years”<sup>4</sup>.

There is no lack of information for mothers who elect to breastfeed or formula feed through health professionals in Hong Kong. In fact with due consideration, 9 out of 10 mothers opt for breastfeeding when their child is born. While maternity units and Mother and Child Health Centres are improving and increasing the support for both breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding mothers through the Baby-Friendly Health Facilities designation programme, the public continues to be bombarded by the promotion of formula milk. The HK Code is needed to reverse the general public's perception that formula feeding is the norm for infants as reflected by reports of public reaction to breastfeeding mothers and the pressure breastfeeding mothers encounter from well-meaning relatives and friends.

The HK Code although voluntary is an important step Hong Kong is taking to protect the health of our community. Evaluation of its effectiveness or otherwise will lay

<sup>1</sup> [http://thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)01024-7.pdf](http://thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(15)01024-7.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)00012-X.pdf](http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(16)00012-X.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA69/A69\\_R9-en.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA69/A69_R9-en.pdf?ua=1)

<sup>4</sup> [http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA69/A69\\_7Add1-en.pdf?ua=1&ua=1](http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA69/A69_7Add1-en.pdf?ua=1&ua=1)

grounds for consideration of legislative enforcement, a measure, a developed country, the United Kingdom, is initiating<sup>5</sup>.

Hong Kong has a responsibility under the Convention of the Rights of the Child to uphold the right of the child “to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health”<sup>6</sup>. When the health of our children, the sustainability of Hong Kong is at stake, we trust Honourable Members of the Legislative Council will support our government in this important public health measure.

**Members of the Alliance for Children’s Commission**

Against Child Abuse

Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Hong Kong Association

Centre for Fathering, Family Value Foundation of Hong Kong

Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF

Hong Kong Committee on Children’s Rights

Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children

Playright Children's Play Association

Save the Children Hong Kong

Ms. Eliza Chan

Ms. Mok Loi Yan, May

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.alisonthewliss.scot/feeding-products-for-babies-and-children-advertising-andpromotion-bill/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>