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Chairman
Panel on Health Services
Legislative Council of the
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
of the People's Republic of China

**Opinion on the “Hong Kong Code of Marketing of Formula Milk and Related Products,
and Food Products for Infants & Young Children” (“the HK Code”)**

Chairman, Honourable members, and Officials:

Hong Kong Doctors Union (“the Union”), representing over 2,000 registered western medical practitioners in Hong Kong, has all along been in support of Hong Kong’s promotion of breastfeeding and agree with the Government’s goal of maintaining breastfeeding. On behalf of the Union, I would like to elaborate further on the current challenges that breastfeeding mothers face. It is proposed that the Government aim at providing the best protection for Hong Kong mothers, infants, and young children, and to take legislative actions instead of implementing a voluntary code.

Establishing a Social Environment that Supports Breastfeeding

As indicated in the Unions’ previous opinion, the World Health Organization recommends breast milk as the most ideal food for infants and encourages exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of their birth. In order to enable every mother to breastfeed, correct information and a supportive social environment is required. But, why is the current breastfeeding rate in Hong Kong still low? According to the cases that our doctors have encountered, mothers have

to overcome many challenges. Promotion of formula milk is only just one of them. From clinical experiences, some mothers have indicated that the inadequacies of work place policies, and/or public restaurant facilities have led them to cease breastfeeding. Others have indicated that they ceased breastfeeding as a result of their family and/or the public's misunderstanding. The Union would like to point out that while the Government is strengthening its regulation of formula milk, the Government ought to approach it from a comprehensive perspective through communal and business support as well as strengthening public education.

Replacing Voluntary Code with Legislation

The Union agrees with the aims underlying the HK Code, namely to protect breastfeeding, and to provide safe and adequate nutrition for infants and young children. As mentioned above, the dissemination of correct information is important in successfully promoting breastfeeding. However, if the HK Code is carried out on a voluntary basis, manufacturers and distributors may decide to whether or not to abide, or selectively abide to the Code. In the Union's opinion, this situation would likely lead to confusion. Mothers and parents who require such products may therefore be unable to obtain the necessary and suitable information in making appropriate choices at the time of purchase. As such, the Union recommends abolishing the voluntary code and immediately legislating in order to better secure the interests of Hong Kong consumers.

Implementation in Stages for Effective Implementation

The Union is further of the opinion that stakeholders' acceptance, compliance and enforcement is required to achieve effective implementation. As such, the Government can also consider implementing legislation in a phased manner. For example, firstly legislating on the promotion of formula milk and foods for infants aged 0-12 months in order to obtain active compliance within the industry and to allow the Government with more effective supervision. This would ultimately best safeguard the interests of Hong Kong mothers, infants, and young children.



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The Union hopes that the Government can consider the above-mentioned points in establishing a friendly and supportive social environment in Hong Kong to support breastfeeding.

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President
Hong Kong Doctors Union
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