

Katherine Douglas

General Public Comment



From: Brittany Chambers <brittany@goodnightmoonchild.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 27, 2023 10:21 AM
To: sbcob
Subject: Deeply concerned about the removal of WEB

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Dear SB County Board of Directors,

I've been a professional fundraiser for 11 years, working with clients ranging from global NGO powerhouses to small, local service-oriented NPOs. I've raised tens of millions of dollars throughout the duration of my career, and I've never seen an instance where a community service – like WEB – didn't reap more than it sowed in terms of benefitting not only the local economy, but the long-term viability of local families and future workers. If we aren't investing in our families, we aren't investing in our future.

In 2020, after the birth of my first child, I moved away from focusing predominantly on fundraising to serve moms and babies. The need for postpartum care was obvious and the data was clear: supporting new families in the immediate postpartum reduced infant and maternal mortality rates and served as preventative medicine for almost every common "side-effect" of our low nurture culture. I trained under a neuroscientist studying the long-term mental, physical, and social effects of early nurture, and opened a local business counseling moms and babies on biologically normal infant sleep and how to lay the foundation for lifelong mental wellness through education and empowerment in the postpartum period.

The news of WEB's closing struck me as odd – and incongruent with everything I know about NPOs as an economic driver and the postpartum period as preventative medicine. WEB's website even notes that for every \$1 invested, there's a \$3 health care cost savings (they also cite 50% less infant emergency medical care at 12 mo and 39% fewer CPS investigations at 5 years, which in and of themselves translates to a tremendous cost-savings not calculated directly in dollars). All of this, nonetheless, for a program that costs less than half a million dollars a year.

But let's take a closer look at the estimated impact of supporting women, specifically, in the postpartum period: The U.S. Senate famously argued that, "Maternal health issues affect the ability to work and can create significant losses in economic productivity. One estimate found that over a 5-year period, maternal morbidity cost the United States \$6.6 billion in lost productivity." You can read more directly from Chairman Don Beyer and the Joint Economic Committee [here](#).

Studies consistently conclude that common – and preventable – health problems experienced by postpartum women impose a substantial economic burden on health systems and society, not to mention the subsequent effects to the children – and partners – of these women.

In 2022, the White House released a 68-page Maternal Health Blueprint, outlining the importance of perinatal and postpartum support services (like WEB) in turning around America's maternal-baby care crisis, saving lives, and, "improving the economic security of families and their children." You can read their full report [here](#).

Ending WEB is not only a giant leap backward for Santa Barbara County, but an action inconsistent with evidence, progressive policy, and federal and global recommendations.

Last March, the World Health Organization released their updated recommendations on maternal and newborn care, recognizing and affirming, "a "positive postnatal experience" as a significant end point for all women

giving birth and their newborns, laying the platform for improved short- and long-term health and well-being. A positive postnatal experience is defined as one in which women, newborns, partners, parents, caregivers and families receive information, reassurance and support in a consistent manner from motivated health workers; where a resourced and flexible health system recognizes the needs of women and babies, and respects their cultural context.” The full report is available [here](#), and yet again speaks to the economic impact of removing maternal-infant postpartum support in addition to the systemic impact to society at large.

The removal of WEB is the removal of an integral piece of the social and structural fabric of Santa Barbara County. 17,000 families have been served by WEB since their inception in 2001. That’s 17,000 mothers given access to postpartum care, mental health screenings, resources, and interventions that facilitate mother-baby bonding, healing, and the eventual return to work. It’s also 17,000 babies that have benefitted from things like lactation support, the advising of skin-to-skin contact, and social-emotional monitoring. To correlate this directly to SB County outcomes, let us be reminded that the WHO and CDC agree that, “breastfed children perform better on intelligence tests, are less likely to be overweight or obese and less prone to diabetes later in life.” Breastmilk also contains antibodies that prevent against illness, and women who breastfeed have a reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancers. (WHO, Breastfeeding Guidelines, 2022).

Experience in infancy lays the foundation for lifelong physical and mental health. The brain circuits that govern mood, anxiety, depression, and resilience are built in the first three years of life and are bolstered by seemingly simple practices like skin-to-skin contact, closeness, and parental engagement (more on the neurobiology of this, [here](#)). All new parents – regardless of socioeconomic status – deserve access to the information. All new parents deserve supportive guidance.

The discontinuation of WEB’s services leave a gaping hole in maternal and infant well-being in Santa Barbara County. It’s a shocking step backward in the march forward for humanity. It’s the removal of fundamental human rights for mothers and babies. It’s a shortsighted approach in an evolving economic climate.

It’s a vote against families. A vote against our community’s children.

I encourage you to research the short and long term implications of removing WEB before making a final decision. Reinstating WEB – even at a cost far greater than what has been budgeted for in the past – would undoubtedly have significant economic and social returns to SB County and humanity at large.

Please feel free to reach out if you want to discuss any of this further.

Thank you,

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