

BELLAS
2110 Eastway Drive
Charlotte, NC 28205

Re: Request for Reconsideration of Funding Decision for Healthy Eating Begins at Birth

Dear:

I am writing to request your help in asking Mecklenburg County's Partnership for Children to reconsider denying funding for BELLAS' Health Eating Begins at Birth program for FY09-10.

BELLAS was not informed of this decision until late April.

According to Smart Start of Mecklenburg County's website, "Smart Start's mission is to advance a high quality, comprehensive, accountable system of care and education for every child beginning with a healthy birth." (emphasis added). To fulfill this mission, Smart Start necessarily must fund programs committed to reaching out to those mothers in need immediately prior to and after the birth of their children. Our organization does just that: providing counseling and nutritional instruction to mothers-to-be (whether it be via visits to WIC clinics, TAPS schools, and the like) and hands-on breastfeeding support immediately after the birth of a child (via office visits, home visits, telephone support, etc.). A review of the organizations currently funded reveals that our program is the only one currently addressing the nutritional needs of babies beginning literally at birth. As set forth in our initial application for funding, the babies our organization serves are born to low income, minority, and adolescent women. These mothers and their children often lack the most basic health care and certainly have no access to lactation services. Lactation support early on is absolutely critical to success in this arena, especially within this target population. While extended breastfeeding is always encouraged, our program's focus is on getting these high-risk women to initiate and continue breastfeeding for the first few months after birth – the months during which these babies' immune systems are most vulnerable and during which the babies benefit most from their mothers' milk. Because our program places intense, concerted efforts up front and for a shorter duration than other programs, we are able to make a dramatic impact upon many hundreds of lives each year and provide starting blocks upon which other health care and education programs can build.

Smart Start has funded our organization since its beginning. We are proud of our services and program effectiveness rate, but we are equally proud of our ability to operate with integrity and to account for all funds received. Additionally, we continue to streamline our program and reassess our goals to provide the most services our funds will allow. With increased medical evidence of the importance of breastfeeding and the

beneficial effects it has on an endless number of facets of a child's life through adulthood, it is very disappointing that Smart Start would deny funding to an organization focused on such services. Indeed, along with prenatal care and a healthy birth, breastfeeding is the "smart start." All scientific research definitively demonstrates that breastfed children are healthier and smarter than their formula-fed peers. Breastfeeding lowers the risk of diarrhea, respiratory tract infections, ear infections, pneumonia, urinary tract infections, childhood obesity, diabetes, childhood cancers and asthma. It is essentially a safety net against the worst effects of poverty. Further, as noted above, our peer counseling program is uniquely tailored to reach teen mothers and minority groups to effectively reduce socioeconomic disparities – goals completely in line with Smart Start's mission as well as the NC Department of Health and Human Services Blueprint for Action on Breastfeeding.

While financial conditions are clearly not optimal, because the rate of return for lactation services at birth is so much higher than for other services provided later on in a child's life (many of which are programs Smart Start currently funds), it would appear limited funds would be most wisely spent supporting the services we provide.

Unfortunately, our organization is heavily dependent upon funds from Smart Start. While we have secured grants from other private foundations and individual donors, these funds cannot cover the operating costs to enable us to keep our organization running. Please consider asking the Mecklenburg Partnership to reverse this denial.

Sincerely,