

[Date]

[Judge's Name]

[Address of the Court]

[Child Name]

[Court Case Number]

Dear Honorable Judge [Insert Name Here]:

Numerous health organizations including The World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the U.S. Surgeon General's Office, and The American Academy of Family Physicians recommend breastfeeding beyond the first year of life based on the considerable benefits breastfeeding imparts to the child. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that "breastfeeding should be continued for *at least* the first year of life and beyond for as long as mutually desired by mother and child" and further states "there is no upper limit to the duration of breastfeeding and no evidence of psychological or developmental harm from breastfeeding into the third year of life or longer" ("Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk," *Pediatrics*, March 2012). Experts have described the natural age of weaning to be anywhere from about 2.5 years to around 7 years old. Currently, the WHO recommends that children be breastfed for a *minimum* of two years. It is important to remember that breastfeeding a toddler is normal.

The benefits of nursing past infancy include both nutritional value and disease protection for as long as breastfeeding continues. After one year, the nutritive value of breastmilk continues to deliver protein, calcium, fat, and vitamin A among other nutrients. Indeed, breastmilk provides substantial amounts of these key ingredients for the developing toddler and there is no known age at which breastmilk is considered nutritionally insignificant for a child. As a child gets older, the composition of breastmilk continues to change to meet his or her nutritional needs. In addition, breastfeeding boosts the immune system through the cells, hormones, and antibodies found in breastmilk. Toddlers who breastfeed have decreased incidences of illness and lower mortality rates. These immunity benefits improve the longer a toddler breastfeeds and the child is less likely to develop ear infections and upper respiratory infections. Breastfeeding toddlers also have fewer allergies and breastfeeding long-term protects against asthma and obesity. To complement these health benefits, breastfeeding toddlers also benefit from the brain boost that breast milk provides. Extensive research on the relationship between cognitive achievement and breastfeeding, including IQ scores and grades in school, has shown the greatest gains for those children breastfed the longest.

In addition to these physiological benefits, nursing toddlers are well adjusted socially. There is a significant link between the duration a child is breastfed and the more socially adjusted they are as 6- to 8-year olds. Children who achieve independence at their own pace are more secure in that independence compared to children forced into independence prematurely. Another important consideration for older children is that they are able to maintain their emotional attachment to a person rather than being forced to switch to an inanimate object such as a

bottle. For toddlers going through enormous changes, some of which are very frustrating, this loving connection is very important in the life of a child.

I ask that you please consider the research presented within when making recommendations on the custody agreement for this particular case.

Most sincerely yours,

[Insert name here]