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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Louisiana Opens the State's First Human Milk Bank

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(New Orleans, Louisiana) – Louisiana is the 22nd state in the United States to have a Human Milk Banking Association of North America (HMBANA)-accredited human milk bank, the Mothers' Milk Bank of Louisiana at Ochsner Baptist. The milk bank, which opened in March 2018, operates out of Ochsner Baptist Medical Center in New Orleans, Louisiana, a Baby-Friendly-designated hospital which fully supports breastfeeding. Ochsner Baptist was part of the first wave of CHEER's Communities and Hospitals Advancing Maternity Practices (CHAMPS) South program during 2014-2017, and became Baby-Friendly designated on October 31, 2017. Ochsner Baptist also has a level IV neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) and understands the critical importance of donated human milk for fragile preterm babies when a mother's own milk is unavailable.

"Establishing the first and only human donor milk bank in Louisiana has been an opportunity of a lifetime," shares Shelley Thibeau, PhD, RNC-NIC, Director of the Mothers' Milk Bank of Louisiana at Ochsner Baptist. "For Louisiana to be the 24th HMBANA milk bank in the US sends a clear message that we understand the needs of our most vulnerable citizens, critically ill infants. Our state healthcare teams are invested in improving infant population health by providing human donor milk when needed. The planning team here at Ochsner understood from the beginning the importance of this mission and set up a collaborative network around the state to accomplish this goal."

The Mothers' Milk Bank of Louisiana at Ochsner Baptist has been operating since December 2015 as a depot site, collecting donated human milk and sending it to the Mothers' Milk Bank at Austin, their HMBANA mentor. It was one of 3 depots in Louisiana, the others being Lafayette General Medical Center in Lafayette and the Birth Center of Baton Rouge. In 2017, the Louisiana milk depots shipped over 55,000 oz. or approximately 429 gallons to the Mothers' Milk Bank at Austin.

Now that the Mothers' Milk Bank of Louisiana at Ochsner Baptist is HMBANA accredited, it will function as a fully operational, independent human milk bank. They are actively accepting donor mother applications. Once the donor mother application is approved, the milk bank can accept their milk, then pasteurize and distribute the milk to hospitals in need. Initially, the Mothers' Milk Bank of Louisiana at Ochsner Baptist will distribute milk to the NICUs across the state. Once they feel they are adequately supplying the needs of NICUs, they hope to expand supply to critically ill, older infants across Louisiana.

"Unfortunately, Louisiana has the 3rd highest preterm birth rate and one of the highest disparity indexes in the US," says Shelley. "The vision of our milk bank is to become a vital and sustainable resource to improve Louisiana infant population health."

To learn more about the Mothers' Milk Bank of Louisiana at Ochsner Baptist, or to become a donor or supporter, visit <http://www.ochsner.org/mothersmilkbank>.

