

State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

Testimony in Support of House Bill 5109: An Act Exempting Breastfeeding Supplies From The Sales And Use Taxes

Representative Rojas, Senator Fonfara, Representative Davis, Senator Witkos, and all distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of House Bill 5109: An Act Exempting Breastfeeding Supplies from the Sales and Use Tax. We strongly support this bill in order to support breastfeeding moms and to help make breastfeeding supplies and equipment more affordable.

First, breastfeeding is beneficial for the health of the mother and the baby. One of the most effective preventative measures a mother can take to protect the health of her baby and herself is to breastfeed. Babies who are breastfed are less likely to develop infections, allergies, asthma, cancers, and a range of other health issues. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, breastfeeding is a key tool to improve public health. Breastfeeding has also been shown to lower the risk of breast and ovarian cancer for the mother. Due to these benefits, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that women attempt to exclusively breastfeed for at least the first six months of a baby's life and the World Health Organization recommends breastfeeding up to three years or as long as mutually desired by the mother and baby thereafter.


Despite the recommendation to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2014 Breastfeeding Report Card, "seventy nine percent of newborns started to breastfeed in 2011, though just half of all infants were breastfeeding at six months and a little over a quarter at twelve months." Furthermore, recent research has linked breastfeeding rates to income levels and socioeconomic status, as "seventy four percent of children in families with incomes above 185 percent of the federal poverty line are breastfed, compared to only 57 percent of children in families with incomes at or below that threshold." These statistics are troubling and unfair, as every mother should be able to make the choice as to whether or not to breastfeed her baby regardless of her income level.

Second, exempting breastfeeding supplies and equipment aligns with other sales tax exemptions for babies that have been labelled "essential," including diapers and formula, which are already exempt from the sales and use tax. Exempting these essential items from the sales tax makes them more affordable and breastfeeding supplies and equipment deserve to be treated as essential items as well, especially given the health benefits of breastfeeding. This exemption will help more mothers afford these supplies and equipment, which will help encourage and enable them to breastfeed for a longer period of time and especially when they return to the workplace.

Third, this legislation will save Connecticut in health care costs and support small businesses. It is estimated that \$13 billion of direct health care costs would be saved annually if 90% of women were able to breastfeed exclusively for the first six months¹. Furthermore, babies who are not breastfed visit the physician more often, spend more days in the hospital, and require more prescriptions than breastfed infants. In fact, one study found that for every 1,000 babies not breastfed, there were 2,033 extra physician visits, 212 extra hospitalization days, and 609 extra prescriptions for three illnesses alone – ear, respiratory, and gastrointestinal infections². Furthermore, the costs of baby formula are covered through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC Program) to mothers who choose not to or cannot breastfeed their baby. Offering a greater financial incentive for women to breastfeed would help lower the costs spent on formula, which is more expensive. Additionally, small businesses currently pay the sales tax on the cost of breastfeeding supplies and equipment that are covered by insurance. Eliminating the sales tax on these items would again generate cost-savings for these small businesses, which would result in more affordable pricing for consumers.

Connecticut has the opportunity to become a leader in the fight for women's and children's health initiatives and join the six states that have this exemption in place, which include our regional neighbors New York and New Jersey. These measures will not only improve public health but will benefit our economy overall and the financial well-being of all Connecticut families.

Thank you for your consideration.



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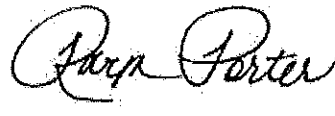
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¹ Bartick M, Reinhold A. The burden of suboptimal breastfeeding in the United States: a pediatric cost analysis. Pediatrics. 2010; 125(5):e1048-e2015

² Ball T & Wright A. (1999)