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INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA – UAW

Testimony by Beverley Brakeman
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Labor and Public Employees Committee Public Hearing
February 9, 2021

IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 5158: AN ACT CONCERNING BREASTFEEDING IN THE WORKPLACE.

Dear Members of Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Beverley Brakeman, and I am from West Hartford, Connecticut. I am the Regional Director for the United Auto Workers Region 9A. I support H.B. 5158: An Act Concerning Breastfeeding in the Workplace.

One of the hardest decisions a new mother faces very soon after the birth of her baby is whether to return to work. Despite women being the fastest growing segment of our workforce, choose not to return because they do not feel supported in their workplace, especially when it comes to having a safe, clean, and private space to express breastmilk while at work.

Medical experts agree that breastfeeding babies, at least through their first year of life, greatly benefits the health of both the mother and newborn child. Sadly, most employers do not offer their employees this benefit leaving many to express milk in dirty toilet stalls or not at all due to the lack of accessible electrical outlets to operate breast pumps. Many of these working moms are left with the inability to express breastmilk while at work, which decreases their bodies ability to continue to produce breastmilk, as well as cause themselves immense physical pain. Going long hours without expressing milk also increases the risk of infection thereby causing women to ultimately not be able to breastfeed their babies or report to work.

Providing a safe, clean, and private space for working mothers to express breastmilk at work would also provide great benefits to employers. More breastfeeding employees would return to the workforce. Breastfeeding employees would miss work less often as most breastfed babies are healthier. It is also the right thing for employers to do at very little cost to support their employees, which in turn creates a happier, healthier, and productive workforce. HB 5158 is a definite win-win for both employee and employer at very little or no cost to the employer.

I urge the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to support H.B. 5158 this session.

Thank you for your time,
Beverley Brakeman
Regional Director
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