

**Testimony for Public Hearing
Labor and Public Employees Committee
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HB 5158 An Act Concerning Breastfeeding in the Workplace

Chairs and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, I write in support of HB 5158. I have practiced Nurse-Midwifery for over 25 yrs in Hartford and the surrounding communities. Every single one of those 25 years has been dedicated to promote healthy decision-making and supporting women in the different phases of their life span. We know of the overwhelming documented short- and long-term medical and neurodevelopment advantages of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding reduces the risk for certain allergic diseases, asthma, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. It improves an infant's cognitive development. The benefits of breastfeeding and the impact of breast milk for both mother and baby are well established and frankly, too numerous to elaborate in this testimony. We need to support initiatives that help mothers returning to work, continue their commitment to breastfeeding and storing milk.

HB 5158 will strengthen existing protections for workers who breastfeed and will require an employer to make a reasonable effort to provide a private lactation room in the workplace that is free from intrusion and shielded from the public and is near a refrigerator for breastmilk to be adequately stored. The economic benefits for families begin on day one of the infant's life. A cost analysis concluded that if 90% of US mothers would breastfeed exclusively for the recommended 6 months, there would be a savings of \$13 billion per year. These calculated savings do not even include those related to a reduction in parental absenteeism from work or adult deaths from diseases acquired in childhood, such as asthma, type 1 diabetes mellitus, or obesity-related conditions. Strategies that increase the number of mothers who breastfeed exclusively for 6 months, would be of great economic benefit on a national level.

The need to return to work, the cost of support needed for successful breastfeeding, and lack of access to professional help are among the systemic barriers faced by Black breastfeeding mothers. Mothers who work in low-wage, on-call scheduling jobs such as retail or food service often cannot afford to take extended leave to care for a newborn soon after giving birth which means these women are less likely to start breastfeeding, knowing the difficulties returning to work imposes on their ability to continue. Many working women often go back to work only to find many obstacles which decrease their ability to continue giving their children the long term benefits of breast milk. Lactation support, access to adequate storage, private areas for expressing milk are key in allowing women to both start and continue breastfeeding.

The Affordable Care Act placed preventative health, strategies to improve health outcomes, and issues of equity and affordability front and center in our newly reformed health care system. We see that the rates of initiation, duration, and exclusivity of breast milk use are dependent on many factors including economic levels, race, culture, labor status and education. Access to better protections for all nursing women can help erase these disparities and help us meet the goals set forth by the Surgeon General in 2010.

I urge you to support HB No. 5158 to benefit the women and children of Connecticut.