

Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW
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In support of House Bill 5158 *An Act Concerning Breastfeeding in the Workplace*
February 9, 2021

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and honorable members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Senior Director of Public Policy, Advocacy & Organizing at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support of House Bill 5158 *An Act Concerning Breastfeeding in the Workplace*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 62,000 patients yearly for sexual and reproductive health services in 14 health centers across the state. As a health care provider and advocate, Planned Parenthood's top priority is ensuring that all individuals have access to the health care and information they need, including the full range of sexual and reproductive health services. We have long fought for a woman's right to control her reproductive destiny which includes planning her family and raising her family in safe, healthy, and sustainable environments.

As advocates for reproductive freedom we must consider all aspects of a woman's life including those that affect her economic stability. Current Connecticut state law requires employers to make reasonable efforts to provide a private room to breastfeed; however, women still face significant barriers to breastfeeding and pumping milk at work. The United States has reported one of the lowest breastfeeding initiation rates among industrialized nations and it's the only developed country without laws that mandate paid parental leave. ⁱ

Women with children are the fastest-growing segment of the workforce. Balancing work and family are an important priority for all employees. Today, more than 80% of new mothers in the United States begin breastfeeding, and 6 in every 10 new mothers are in the workforce.ⁱⁱ Leading health bodies such as the World Health Organization recommend that babies be exclusively breastfed for six months, and then continue to nurse for two years. Breastfeeding is one of the most effective ways to ensure child health and survival. However, nearly 2 out of 3 infants are not exclusively breastfed for the recommended 6 months—a rate that has not improved in 2 decades.ⁱⁱⁱ There is a significant disparity among who is breastfeeding with a look at data from the National Immunization Survey-Child, 85 percent of white mothers saying they breastfed, far more than the 69 percent of black mothers who said the same— a 16 percent disparity.^{iv}

Mothers who work in low-wage jobs, with unpredictable or on-call scheduling, such as retail or food service often cannot afford to take extended leave to care for a newborn and are forced to return to work soon after giving birth because paid family leave is not a guaranteed right in the United States. Thankfully new parents will soon have access to paid family leave in Connecticut to take more time after the birth of a child to bond and breastfeed if they choose. Decisions to breastfeed often depend heavily on working conditions, unpredictable on-call shift schedules, and lack of access to benefits like paid leave after the birth of a child present significant barriers for women, especially low-wage workers who are disproportionately women of color, to continue to breastfeed after returning to work.

Breastfeeding is a personal decision and every person who chooses to breastfeed should have the accommodations at their workplace to support that choice. House Bill 5158 strengthens 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 and electrical outlet. New parents should not have to choose between breastfeeding their child and continuing to work to support their families. We should be doing everything that is possible to make caring for your children easier when a parent returns to work and that is why we urge you to support House Bill 5158 *An Act Concerning Breastfeeding in the Workplace*. Thank you for your time and consideration.

ⁱ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/racial-disparities-persist-for-breastfeeding-moms-heres-why>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.womenshealth.gov/supporting-nursing-moms-work#references>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.who.int/health-topics/breastfeeding#tab=tab_1

^{iv} <https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/reportcard.htm>