

## Advocacy Resource - Child Custody/Separation in COVID-19

Date

Judges Name

Address of the Court

Child Name

Court Case Number

Dear Honorable Judge [Insert Name Here]:

I am writing to ask your support to protect and preserve the needs of the breastfeeding child when determining allocation of parenting time in accordance with *MCLS §722.27a, Child Custody Act of 1970*. Breastfeeding is evidence-based practice and an important public health issue for infants and young children. Numerous health organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, the U.S. Surgeon General's Office, and the American Academy of Family Physicians recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life based on the nutritive, immunological, and socioemotional benefits of human milk. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that "breastfeeding should be continued for at least the first year of life and beyond for as long as mutually desired by mother and child." Currently, the WHO recommends that children be breastfed for a minimum of two years as the biological standard.

Human milk provides nutrition and disease protection for as long as breastfeeding continues. Human milk boosts the immune system through the various cells, hormones, and antibodies contained within and there is no comparison between human milk and infant formula in terms of optimal nutrition for infants and young children. After one year, human milk continues to provide the young child with protein, calcium, fat, and vitamin A among other nutrients. An additional benefit of human milk is its ability to protect against COVID-19. Human milk produced by infected mothers contains antibodies that neutralize SARS-CoV-2 and pass on immunity to protect breastfeeding infants and children from acquiring the disease.

Children who are breastfed are half as likely to have any illness during their first year of life when compared to formula-fed babies. Formula fed infants have an 8 times greater infant mortality rate regardless of income level or background. Extensive research demonstrates that formula fed babies are more likely to suffer from meningitis, childhood leukemia, diabetes, respiratory illnesses, diarrhea, ear infections, allergies, obesity, and developmental delays. During breastfeeding, the mother responds to her child's hunger, sleep, and distress cues. Lengthy separations are difficult to navigate for both the mother and child and puts the breastfeeding relationship into jeopardy. For families going through difficult changes, breastfeeding is a loving connection that offers security and stability to the child. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues in this country, and in light of all the protective qualities found in human milk, I ask that you recommend shorter periods of separation from the mother, including no overnight visits until after the child has weaned when making custody arrangements for this particular case.

Most sincerely yours,

Signature

Full name