



*Public Testimony from MIBFN Executive Director, Shannon McKenney Shubert, before the Michigan Health Policy Committee Regarding Support for Senate Bill 231 of 2023, Expansion of the Michigan Breastfeeding Anti-Discrimination Law*

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Hello Chairman Hertel and Members of the Senate Health Policy Committee. My name is Shannon McKenney Shubert. I am a constituent of Vice Chairwoman Santana's. My 3 children, my husband, and I split our time between Dearborn and Wyandotte, Michigan. I also serve as Executive Director of Michigan Breastfeeding Network. I am so honored to be here with you today, speaking to you in solidarity with families across Michigan, and most especially with my infant daughter, Josephine who is here with me today.

Being here is kind of a full circle moment for me. When we were advocating for the Breastfeeding Anti-Discrimination Act in 2014, I was a brand new mom. My then-infant daughter Samantha came with me and gave all her toothy grins to Representative Klint Kesto while I spoke about why I grudgingly became willing to breastfeed in public, how I traded in my business suits for nursing shirts and infinity scarves, and why we needed my right to feed Samantha whenever, wherever, to be protected. When that bill passed, it was a huge sigh of relief for so many of us. It meant we were no longer dealing with both the responsibility of caring for our babies, and the emotional weight of potential repercussions for doing so in public. We could focus on our babies and ensure they got the nourishment they needed.

Since Governor Snyder signed the Breastfeeding Anti-Discrimination act into law, it has been immensely popular. It's good for babies, families, and businesses across Michigan.

I'm from Michigan and I take deep pride in the ingenuity of our state. I especially love it when our state is out front, leading in the areas that make this a great place to live. In 2014, Michigan was the 46th of the 50 states to pass a law protecting public breastfeeding. And, while that law is immensely popular, nationally, breastfeeding supporters have come to understand that protecting public breastfeeding is not enough. In Michigan, 90% of families also pump milk as part of their infant feeding journey, and that right must be protected too. Today, we have a chance to be the first state in the US to protect public milk expression in addition to public breastfeeding. And, we must.

Human milk saves lives and is foundational to lifelong health. I always say to folks, "If you care about health, and you care about people, then you care about increasing access to human milk."

For example, if infant mortality weighs on your heart, in the first year of life alone, human milk cuts the chance of infant death by 21 percent, and continues to protect both parent and child over the life course.

If you care about criminal justice system reform, it's important to know that human milk feeding during and after incarceration has been demonstrated to reduce recidivism and support reintegration into society.

If you work to strengthen your local business community, data shows that employees who breastfeed have lower absenteeism because of the improved health outcomes for their babies.

If your priority is responsible spending, it's important to know that the World Health Organization cites breastfeeding as the most cost-effective strategy for improving infant and maternal health outcomes.

If you care about mental health, please know that human lactation lowers the stress response within the bodies of both parent and infant and also decreases rates of postpartum depression.

If you champion families of color, human milk feeding is integral to the reclamation of traditional birthing practices of Black and Indigenous families from the longstanding, detrimental impacts of colonialism, slavery, and genocide.

If your community is navigating the impacts of lead poisoned water, I want you to know that human milk is protective against lead poisoning.

And, if you open your home to children who are part of the Michigan foster system, please know that feeding expressed human milk via a donor or a parent is lifesaving medicine when provided to babies in the foster system.

I could go on, but my larger point is that because human milk benefits everyone, everyone should partner and work together for the success of families to provide their babies and children with human milk in whatever way works for each family.

And, we must be clear that it's not just access to human milk that matters. Milk expression matters specifically. There are so many reasons why direct bodyfeeding is not always feasible or possible. I have heard countless stories of folks who absolutely must pump breastmilk. These include developmental abnormalities of the baby's mouth - like tongue tie and cleft palate - that make direct latch extremely difficult and sometimes impossible. They include long term separation of infant and parent because of NICU admission for special care. And daily separations due to returning to school with long hours away from home. There are so many reasons why families decide to pump milk for their babies, and many times it's the most fragile babies who consistently receive expressed milk. What matters most, is that the baby is receiving human milk. Anything we can do to make that more feasible, we must. That includes protection of public milk expression via passage of Senate Bill 351. Thank you for your time, your service, and your consideration of this important legislation.