

DC BREASTFEEDING COALITION, INC.

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CONTACT: Dr. Sahira Long, DCBFC  
202-420-2732 or [slong@dcbfc.org](mailto:slong@dcbfc.org)

DC BREASTFEEDING COALITION CELEBRATES PASSAGE OF BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT PROVISION IN HEALTH CARE REFORM

Washington, DC—The DC Breastfeeding Coalition (DCBFC) celebrates the passage of the health care reform package and the provision supporting breastfeeding in the workplace. The provision states that employers shall provide reasonable, unpaid break time and a private, non-bathroom place for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for one year after the child's birth. Employers with less than 50 employees are not subject to the requirement if it would cause "undue hardship."

DCBFC President, Sahira Long, MD, applauds the legislation's recognition of breastfeeding as an important preventive health care strategy to improve health outcomes in our country. "Breastfeeding is a proven benefit for mothers, babies and society. These benefits increase with breastfeeding duration" says Dr. Long. "However, without workplace lactation support, it is difficult for women to meet the recommended goal of exclusive breastfeeding for six months to one year or beyond. With the passage of this new law, mothers across the nation will have support in the workplace to continue breastfeeding and businesses can play a major role in assisting mothers in balancing working and breastfeeding" says Dr. Long. The provisions in the new federal law are a complement to DC's existing Child Right to Nurse Law.

Although many are aware of the health benefits of breastfeeding, employers may not recognize the economic benefits that they accrue. The Business Case for Breastfeeding, published in 2008 by DHHS, demonstrates an impressive return on investment for employers that provide workplace lactation support, including lower health care costs, absenteeism, and turnover rates. Employees whose companies provide breastfeeding support consistently report improved morale, better satisfaction with their jobs, and higher productivity. As part of the Business Case for Breastfeeding initiative, coalitions in 32 states and territories received training to assist employers in establishing lactation programs. Dr Long says that she is "hopeful that the DCBFC in collaboration with Maryland Breastfeeding Coalition and Baltimore Healthy Start, will partake in this training program this summer to educate and assist DC area businesses in providing lactation support to their employees".

Dr. Long says it takes little for a company to provide lactation support. Basic needs include a clean place to express milk in privacy and break time to express milk approximately every 3 hours during the work period. A model law in Oregon defines reasonable time for milk expression as 30 minutes for every 4 hours worked; a good match between natural breastfeeding cycle and the rhythms of the workday. A growing number of companies

across the United States offer workplace lactation programs that also include access to information and professional support from a lactation consultant or other health experts. Currently, 24 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia have legislation related to breastfeeding in the workplace. The new federal provision will provide a minimum level of support in all states, but it will not preempt a State law that provides stronger protection.

After championing the most detailed of the state workplace support laws in Oregon (passed in 2007), U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley introduced “Reasonable Break Time for Nursing Mothers” as an amendment to the Senate HELP Committee’s health reform bill last year. Although the law was effective immediately upon President Obama’s signing of the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act, the U.S. Department of Labor must now work to define the terms and enforcement procedures.

The DCBFC will be closely monitoring and supporting this process. “DCBFC stands ready to support DC employers and breastfeeding employees with tools, information, and resources” says Dr. Long. Employers, human resource managers, and breastfeeding employees who are interested in helping to establish worksite lactation programs at their place of employment can find further information on the Office on Women’s Health website (<http://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding/programs/business-case/index.cfm>) and the DCBFC website (<http://dcbfc.org/workplaceSupport.php#1>).

*The DC Breastfeeding Coalition, established in 2004, is a non-profit organization ([www.dcbfc.org](http://www.dcbfc.org)) dedicated to enhancing the health of families in the District through improved breastfeeding initiation and duration rates. It is the Coalitions’ goal to promote environments that establish human lactation as a societal norm.*

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