



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH
LANSING

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June 3, 2014

Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee on companion bills to Breast Feeding Anti-discrimination Act -- HB 5591 and HB 5592

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Senator Jones and Honorable members of the Senate Judiciary Committee:

My name is Rashmi Travis and I serve the Bureau Director of Family, Maternal, and Child Health at the Michigan Department of Community Health. I am here today to provide testimony to the Anti-Discrimination companion bills HB 5591 and HB 5592.

The benefits of breast feeding can be seen in the ability to improve infant health, promote population health improvements, and assist in the state's efforts to reduce infant mortality. Breast milk and the act of breast feeding itself improves the health of both women and infants, which helps improve overall population health in the state of Michigan. Breast feeding also aids in reducing infant mortality rates which is one of the state's top priorities.

Breast feeding has many positive effects that benefit both the infant and mother which include: promoting bonding between mother and child, improving the immune system of an infant as a mother provides natural immunity for those babies who are too young to receive vaccinations, reducing obesity rates, reducing pregnancy weight, and lowering long-term risks to heart disease and cancer.

Sometimes women face challenges to breast feeding, some of which include not having a safe comfortable environment to breast feed or facing prosecution or persecution for breast feeding in public. These barriers create obstacles to promoting improvements in population health.

2013 CDC data indicate that mothers who report initiating breast feeding is 74.5% in Michigan, while nationally it's 76.5%. Those who continue breast feeding at 6 months in the state are 45.1%, while nationally the percentage is 49%. At 12 month intervals, breast feeding declines to 22.8% in the state, while nationally the rates are 27.0%. From these figures, you can see that Michigan's breast feeding rates fall below national levels and decline over time. Our state is working to promote this activity and reduce infant mortality rates.

It is important to create an environment where a woman feels comfortable and safe to breast feed her infant, such that these protective effects can have a long-lasting effect on the health of the infant, mother, and population health.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on encouraging breast feeding as a way to impact infant mortality efforts and improve population health in the state of Michigan.