

Karen K. Ehrens, RD, LRD
Testimony HB 1105
March 16, 2021

Chair Lee and Members of the Human Services Committee:

Good day. I am Karen Ehrens, a mother, a Licensed, Registered Dietitian, member of the North Dakota Public Health Association, and a person who works to reduce hunger in our state and our communities.

Breastfeeding benefits infants in numerous ways. In addition to providing optimal nutrition, breastfeeding decreases the risk of childhood obesity and diabetes; guarantees safe, fresh milk; enhances the immune system; protects against infectious and non-infectious diseases; protects against asthma, allergies and intolerances; decreases risk of diarrhea and respiratory infections; increases cognitive function, reduces risk for heart disease, and increases bonding with mother.^{1,2}

Breastfeeding benefits mothers' health by decreasing the risk of breast, ovarian, endometrial and thyroid cancers; decreasing the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes and improving blood sugar level in women who develop gestational diabetes; improving bone density and decreasing risk for hip fracture; and strengthening the bond with the baby. Breastfeeding eliminates the need for preparing and mixing formula and saves money by not spending it on formula.^{1,2} Breast milk is the first food; it is available in times of emergency.

Breastfeeding benefits businesses and provides a return on investment. Employees who are breastfeeding their children miss work less often, with up to two times fewer maternal absences to care for children. Breastfeeding lowers health care and health insurance costs and reduces sick time taken by both mothers and fathers for their children's illnesses. Breastfeeding helps to retain experienced employees.³

It's time to update this legislation. The idea for this bill was first launched in 2003, when my daughter was 5 years old. My family asks that you support this legislation to send a message to the young families we are trying to keep in the state and the young professionals we are trying to attract to the state. Thank you for the opportunity to speak and for your attention.

Breastfeeding is **not** indecent; keeping food from people **IS** indecent.

References:

1. Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: *Promoting and Supporting Breastfeeding*, Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2015 (J Acad Nutr Diet. 2015;115:444-449).
2. *Benefits of Breastfeeding*, American Academy of Pediatrics, updated 3/2021, accessed at: <https://services.aap.org/en/patient-care/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-overview/>
3. *The Business Case for Breastfeeding*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 2008. <https://www.womenshealth.gov/files/assets/docs/breastfeeding/business-case/business-case-for-breastfeeding-for-business-managers.pdf>