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Testimony Re: H-5809 An Act Relating to Health and Safety - Breastfeeding

House Health Education & Welfare Committee

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports House Bill 5809, which would create an enforcement process for the right to breastfeed at work and requires all schools to provide reasonable accommodations for student mothers who are breastfeeding.

Women who want to continue breastfeeding after they return to work or school require modifications in order to maintain milk supply. Breastfeeding is widely recognized as the best method of feeding and nurturing infants. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children should be exclusively breastfed for six months after birth.

Research shows that breastfeeding is good for the baby and good for the mother. Breastfed children have fewer ear, respiratory and urinary tract infections and have diarrhea less often. Infants who are exclusively breastfed tend to need fewer health care visits, prescriptions, and hospitalizations, resulting in lower total medical care costs compared to never-breast fed infants. Women who breastfeed have a reduced risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer, osteoporosis, and Type 2 diabetes.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as of 2016, approximately 81% of new mothers in the U.S. start breastfeeding (82% of Rhode Island mothers), **but only about 52% are breastfeeding six months later (56% for Rhode Island mothers)**. Requiring and enforcing workplace and school accommodations to support breastfeeding should help to increase the percentage of mothers who are able to continue breastfeeding after returning to work or school.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We urge your support for this legislation which will help improve the economic security of families with infants and provide support for breastfeeding mothers.