

Rep. Subeck: Will reintroduce Healthy Babies, Working Mothers Act to support nursing mothers in the workplace

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MADISON – Today, Representative Lisa Subeck (D-Madison), together with Representative Joan Ballweg (R-Markesan) and Senator LaTonya Johnson (D-Milwaukee), circulated for co-sponsorship the Healthy Babies, Working Mothers Act (LRB-1206) to ensure nursing mothers do not face unnecessary barriers in the workplace. LRB-1206 would bring Wisconsin law in line with federal employment regulations regarding breastfeeding and ensure that women who are taking unpaid break time to breastfeed or express breast milk do not lose eligibility for employer sponsored health insurance. LRB-1206 is identical to 2015 AB 882 which received bipartisan support and a public hearing last year but did not pass out of committee before the end of the legislative session.

“New mothers should not have to choose between making the healthy choice of breastfeeding their babies and the ability to provide health care for their families,” said Representative Lisa Subeck. “This bill would update state law and remove a huge barrier for breastfeeding mothers returning to the workforce.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for an infant’s first six months, with continued breastfeeding as complementary foods are introduced. However, working mothers are less likely to initiate breastfeeding and are more likely to breastfeed for a shorter length of time than women who don’t have to deal with workplace barriers. In 2010, the federal government updated the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), requiring employers to provide accommodations at the workplace which would enable nursing mothers to breastfeed or express milk at work. This bill codifies these changes at the state level and adds critical protections

to ensure nursing mothers are not forced to choose between breastfeeding and health care. The bill ensures new mothers can maintain their healthcare coverage by counting any unpaid breaks for the purpose of breastfeeding or expressing milk toward any minimum hours required for health care eligibility.

“This bill responds to concerns from a constituent who contacted me about the challenges she faced as a nursing mother returning to work. Her employer has made accommodations for her to express breast milk at work and allowed her unpaid breaks to do so. Unfortunately, because these breaks are unpaid, her hours dropped slightly under the minimum threshold for health insurance eligibility,” said Subeck. “Upon introducing this bill during the last legislative session, I began hearing from other mothers who had faced challenges returning to work while breastfeeding, as well. This bill ensures that accommodations are made for nursing mothers and that they are able to maintain their health care coverage.”

“No new mother should have to choose between making the healthy choice for her baby and returning to the workforce. The Healthy Babies, Working Mothers Act would help ensure a smooth transition back to work and guarantee that no woman would have to make the impossible choice between breastfeeding her new baby and providing health coverage for her family.” said Subeck.