

16 February 2005

Chairman Jim Morrison

House Health and Human Services
300 SW 10th Ave. Room #171W
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1504

Dear Chairman Morrison:

My name is Julie Burkhart and I am the executive director of ProKanDo, which is a pro-woman, reproductive rights organization. I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to address the committee regarding HB 2284.

HB 2284 would exempt women from criminal statutes, should they choose to breast-feed their children in a public place, which is ultimately good for children, mothers and community. The text of the bill acknowledges breast-milk as the most complete form of nutrition for infants. The bill also acknowledges that breastfeeding has economic and environmental gains for society. These are only a few of the benefits of breastfeeding. Across the United States, thirty-nine states have already passed protective breastfeeding legislation, so that women will feel comfortable giving their children the best possible start in life.

Breast milk offers children immunity from serious illnesses such as bacterial meningitis, respiratory tract infections and asthma. Children who are breastfed also show slightly enhanced performance on cognitive development tests. Health benefits for the mother include decreased risk of breast cancer, earlier return to pre-pregnancy weight and decreased risk in ovarian cancer. It is also well known that breastfeeding increases bonding between mother and child.

Breastfeeding also offers many benefits to society, such as decreased health care costs. Breastfed children have significantly less illnesses than do non-

breastfed children, thus reducing the number of doctor visits. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement on breastfeeding, the annual health care cost for the United States could be decreased by \$3.6 billion. The cost of public health programs, such as Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), could also be decreased if the number of breastfed children increased. WIC could potentially save millions of dollars if there were a decreased need for formula. In turn, there would be a decreased environmental burden for disposal of formula cans and bottles if more women were to nurse their children.¹ Breastfeeding also holds an economic benefit for families and single mothers, who would save money by not purchasing formula.

Recently, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued its strongest endorsement of breastfeeding (this article has been made available for your review). In this article, the Academy recommends that legislation be passed that will protect the right of women to breast-feed their children.

It is for these reasons that I strongly urge you to support this bill. We must support and protect a woman's right to breastfeed her child. The benefits of breastfeeding are far too great. Mothers should be encouraged to nurse their children and should be able to do so in an environment that is hospitable. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Julie Burkhart
Executive Director

¹ See American Association of Pediatrics, "Children's Health Topics: Breastfeeding", <http://www.aap.org/healthtopics/breastfeeding.cfm>

