



STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH  
LANSING

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**Testimony Re: the Breastfeeding Anti-Discrimination Act and Related House Legislation  
May 22, 2014  
Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP – Chief Medical Executive, Department of Community Health**

**Promoting Breastfeeding as a Way to Improve Individual and Population Health**

Mr. Chairman and Honorable members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I am grateful for the opportunity to address you today regarding breastfeeding and public health in Michigan. I am Dr. Matthew Davis, and I serve as the Chief Medical Executive for the State of Michigan, in the Department of Community Health.

I am here to express my view as the Chief Medical Executive that SB 674 (the Breastfeeding Anti-Discrimination Act) as passed by the Senate, and companion HB 5591 and HB 5592, are consistent with current statewide efforts in Michigan to promote infant health, reduce infant mortality, and reduce childhood and adult obesity.

The Department of Community Health is not the lead for these bills; nor have the bills been assigned to DCH. Therefore, the Department does not take a formal position on the bills before you today.

Nevertheless, the potential positive impact of these bills on breastfeeding in Michigan cannot be overstated. As the original form of human nutrition, mother's milk and the very act of breastfeeding are known to have a wide range of positive health effects – for mothers and for their children. Breastfeeding helps nourish children in an optimally balanced way, with the best possible combination of nutrients that help young children develop in healthy ways and avoid feeding habits that set the stage for later obesity. Breastmilk also shields children from infections by sharing the mothers' natural immune protection, starting before babies are old enough to receive most vaccines themselves. In these ways, breastfeeding promotes infant health and reduces the risk of infant mortality, which are top priorities for our state.

Breastfeeding also promotes women's health. Women who breastfeed are more likely to return to their pre-pregnancy weight, which helps address the obesity epidemic among adults in Michigan – another major emphasis in improving population health for the State of Michigan.

These are just some of the many benefits of breastfeeding. Nevertheless, if a mother is worried that breastfeeding in public will put her at risk for being treated differently than other members of the community, that can have a chilling effect. A woman afraid of persecution or prosecution may decide not to breastfeed – thereby losing all the potential benefits that I have just mentioned.

That is a loss that Michigan, and its mothers and young children, cannot any longer afford. From state and national data, it is clear that rates of breastfeeding in Michigan lag behind rates in the majority of other states. As the lead clinician for the people of Michigan, increasing breastfeeding is a main objective of mine as we work to improve our rates of infant mortality and obesity. Simply stated: there is no better example than breastfeeding for a single strategy that can have such broad benefits for individual health and population health. Breastfeeding saves lives, and promoting breastfeeding is good policy.