

Judiciary Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1435

AN ACT CONCERNING MOTHERS WHO ARE INCARCERATED

Title: BREASTFEEDING THEIR INFANT.

Vote Date: 4/8/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/26/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Judiciary Committee

CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep. Maryam Khan, 5th District

Sen. Heather S. Somers, 18th District

REASONS FOR BILL:

Currently, there's no law or policy in place for incarcerated mothers to breastfeed their infants during visitation. Multiple studies from around the country have shown that there are proven medical and cognitive benefits of breastfeeding for both the mother and the child. Therefore, this bill would help to address a critical public health issue for mothers and their children by allowing incarcerated mothers to breastfeed their infants during visitation.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Deborah Del Prete Sullivan, Legal Counsel, Office of Chief Public Defender (OCPD):

She submitted testimony in support of this bill. She explained that to implement this bill, the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections (DOC) would need to develop a policy permitting an inmate to breastfeed their child. She furthered that it is well-established that breastfeeding has many benefits, both physical and psychological, for newborns and birth parents alike. There are documented disparities that show lower rates of breastfeeding among Black individuals and low-income populations, a reflection of systemic racism and bias in promoting and supporting lactation.

DeVaughn Ward, Interim Correction Ombuds, Office of Correction Ombuds:

He submitted testimony in support of this bill. As expressed by Commissioner Quiros and Warden Sexton, policies like these improve the conditions for those in prison; it affirms their

dignity and humanity. He stated that allowing mothers to breastfeed will preserve the connection between families and improve public health and community re-entry. He furthered that he has witnessed the emotional and physical toll the prison system can place on incarcerated mothers and while his will not erase the trauma of incarceration, it is a step for the state to continue to grow using the framework of trauma-informed, family centered correctional policies.

Denise Drummond, Rosemary Lopez, Thomas Nuccio, The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity (CWCSEO): They submitted testimony in support of this bill, explaining that it will advance public health, racial equity, and humane treatment of incarcerated women. The stated that breastfeeding has benefits for both mother and child by promoting healthy development, reducing the risk of infections, supporting emotional bonding, and protecting babies against short and long-term illness and disease. They furthered that incarcerated mothers face many obstacles to breastfeeding due to physical distance and lack of appropriate accommodations.

Angel Quiros, Commissioner, Department of Corrections: He submitted testimony in support of this bill. As there is no current law in Connecticut to allow for breastfeeding while incarcerated, this legislation would allow DOC to expand efforts to support incarcerated mothers. He supports making accommodations for nursing individuals in custody, including short-stay facilities and would like to see correction facilities that house pregnant and postpartum individuals to devise a system that allows for breastfeeding. He stated that in 2022, York Correctional Institute created a Pregnancy, Pumping and Postpartum tier to provide women with a supportive environment; cells are equipped with the necessary supplies allowing women to pump. He believes this bill addresses the critical public health issue for mothers and children by enhancing existing efforts to normalize breastfeeding in prison and fostering secure attachments and mother-child bonding.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Heather S. Somers, Senator, State of Connecticut: She submitted testimony in support of this bill. Breastfeeding is crucial for the health and well-being of incarcerated mothers and their children, but it also ensures their dignity, emotional health, and family preservation. It is also an essential part of maternal-child bond, it provides ideal nutrition, strengthens an infant's immune system, and significantly reduces the risk of infections, illness, and even sudden infant death syndrome. There are positives for mothers such as stabilizing hormones, reducing stress, and lowering the risk of postpartum depression, breast cancer and other health concerns. She believes denying a mother the chance to breastfeed as she is incarcerated is an unnecessary punishment and can have severe consequences for the infant's emotional health, increasing the risk for Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) and long-term development issues. She believes this is not just a policy issue, but it is a matter of justice.

Lori LeDonne, Smart Justice Leader, ACLU Connecticut: They submitted testimony in support of this bill. They believe Connecticut should be prioritizing the health and safety of vulnerable residents and that includes the incarcerated. They believe the quality of healthcare of incarcerated people in Connecticut has been negligent and borderline criminal. Supporting this normalizes breastfeeding and helps all people to continue to participate in society.

Amber Kelly, Professor of Social Work, Quinnipiac University: They submitted testimony in support of this bill. As a licensed clinical social worker and advocate for maternal and child health, she commends the legislature for recognizing the importance of supporting the bond between mother and child even in the correctional settings. Breastfeeding is a basic human right and has many well-documented benefits. This bill gives Connecticut the opportunity to ensure incarcerated women are not stripped of their ability to nurture children; it is not a special privilege but is a basic human right and upholding public health standards. She believes that by denying breastfeeding it would be another way the systems perpetuate family separation and intergenerational trauma.

Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, ACLU-CT: They submitted testimony in support of this bill. She believes access to healthcare is a constitutional right under the Eighth Amendment and extended to states by the Fourteenth Amendment. Being incarcerated impacts life expectancy and impacts Black and Brown communities disproportionately. She explained that there is no policy in Connecticut to allow the incarcerated to breastfeed their babies. The ACLU-CT recommends including gender-inclusive pronouns as transgender men and nonbinary parents are also capable of breastfeeding their children and deserve the same access. They urge passage with the suggested amendment.

Sara Adamson, Grad Student, UCONN, School of Social Work: They submitted testimony in support of this bill. During the lactation process, there is a strong bond that is developed between mother and infant; this bond plays a role in the child's emotional development. Lactation provides many nutritional benefits for the baby and helps the mother by releasing hormones that reduce stress and postpartum depression, additional reasons why breastfeeding is critical. It is important that these reasons are taken into consideration in making a final decision to pass this bill.

Ashley Minihan, Doula: They submitted testimony in support of this bill. They believe breastfeeding is critical and the opportunity to breastfeed should also be given to those who are incarcerated. As well as many health benefits, breastfeeding also fosters critical maternal-infant bonding, which has been shown to improve long-term emotional and psychological outcomes. By not allowing an incarcerated mother to breastfeed, an unnecessary barrier is created for public health and human dignity. This is a step for Connecticut to ensure equitable healthcare and bonding opportunities for all mothers and infants, even the incarcerated.

Mary Sherwin: They submitted testimony in support of this bill. As a mother, grandmother, and one of eleven children she knows that being breastfed gives a child many health benefits. A child who has an incarcerated parent should not be further harmed by disallowing breastfeeding and regular visitation.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Bonnie Gray

Date: April 14, 2025