

My name is Maura Ferguson and I am a resident of District 18. I am also a mother of three children, all of whom were exclusively breastfed until 6 months old as recommended by all major health organizations. My children also breastfed until they were ready to wean, up to age three. This legislation is very important to me personally and I would like to express my support of bill HB1105.

It is unequivocally true that breastfeeding is the ideal way to feed babies as it has many benefits to both physical and mental health of the mother/baby pair. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that mothers breastfeed exclusively for at least six months and continue breastfeeding up until the baby is at least one year old or as long as mutually desired by mother and baby. Additionally, the World Health Organization states: "Breastfed children perform better on intelligence tests, are less likely to be overweight or obese and less prone to diabetes later in life. Women who breastfeed also have a reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancers." However, I can state from firsthand experience that as babies get older and more capable, it becomes harder to nurse them with a cover. We cannot expect nursing mothers to stay home every single time babies need to eat. Moreover, we should not make nursing mothers feel unwelcome in public if their baby gets hungry. Feeding babies is not sexual nor political, it is simply doing what is best for baby. I think we can all agree that babies deserve to be fed when they are hungry.

The largest problem with NDCC 23.12.16 as it stands is the verbiage "discreet and modest", as it leaves far too much room for interpretation. This ambiguity could pose a problem for a mother who is nursing in public, as "discreet and modest" does not have a universal definition. This leaves nursing mothers vulnerable to potential arrest, which could prove to be a traumatic incident that could discourage the mother from continuing her nursing relationship with her baby.

Other states have statutes with more clear protection for nursing mothers. In Minnesota, MN Statute 145.905 reads as follows: "A mother may breastfeed in any location, public or private, where the mother and child are otherwise authorized to be, irrespective of whether the nipple of the mother's breast is uncovered during or incidental to the breast-feeding."

I urge you to pass HB1105, as breastfeeding sets up children for success from day one. I can speak firsthand of how difficult it is to be a nursing mother, and I believe that women should be free to nurse their babies wherever they are otherwise authorized to be. Additionally, the postpartum period can be isolating and dangerous for a mother's mental health. Feeling confident and legally supported while nursing in public can both help new mothers to combat feelings of loneliness and to further strengthen the mother/infant bond. Nursing should not be viewed as shameful and it should not in any way be prohibited, conversely it should be a welcome act that is normalized and even celebrated. You can help empower new mothers by passing HB1105. Thank you for your time.