Public Breastfeeding in Rhode Island

A FACT SHEET FOR RHODE ISLAND ORGANIZATIONS

A new law supporting breastfeeding families takes effect on **March 1, 2009**. This law allows a woman to breastfeed or bottle-feed her child in any place open to the public.

Educate your members about the benefits of breastfeeding and about Rhode Island breastfeeding laws.

RHODE ISLAND GENERAL LAWS

23-13.5-1. Breastfeeding in public places. A woman may feed her child by bottle or breast in any place open to the public. (2008)

23-13.5-2. Remedies. In any civil action alleging a violation of this chapter, the court may: (1) Afford injunctive relief against any person, entity or public accommodation that commits or proposes to commit a violation of this chapter; and (2) Award compensatory damages and reasonable attorney's fees and costs to a prevailing plaintiff. (2008)

11-45-2. Indecent exposure – Disorderly conduct. (e) In no event shall the provisions of this section be construed to apply to breastfeeding in public. (1998)

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

RHODE ISLAND Breastfeeding COALITION

What does this law mean for my organization?

- An organization employee or member may not prevent a mother from breastfeeding or bottle-feeding her child in a public place. A woman who is asked to stop feeding her child, to move to another location, or to cover herself up while breastfeeding may allege a violation of her civil rights.
- If a woman's rights are violated under this law, she can obtain a court order to prevent any future violations by that organization or individual. If the lawsuit is successful, she may receive payment of reasonable attorney's fees and court costs for bringing the suit, as well as payment for other costs directly related to the violation.

Why is it important to support breastfeeding?

- Breastfeeding protects mothers and their breastfed children from many illnesses and diseases including obesity and some cancers.
- Breastfeeding saves businesses time and money because breastfed children get sick less often and their parents miss less work.

Why is it important to support breastfeeding in public?

- A mother needs to breastfeed her baby whenever the baby is hungry to satisfy her baby and build up and maintain her milk supply. Because young babies need to eat from 8 to 12 times every 24 hours, breastfeeding mothers may frequently need to breastfeed in public places.
- Babies who are fed when they are hungry are less likely to cry and disrupt your community meeting or event.

How can my organization support breastfeeding families?

- Educate your employees and members about the benefits of breastfeeding and about Rhode Island breastfeeding laws.
- Post a "Breastfeeding Welcome Here" decal in a prominent place in your organization. Request it at www.health.ri.gov/family/breastfeeding/laws.php
- Create a designated nursing lounge for mothers who prefer to breastfeed in a private location.