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Breastfeeding provision in federal health care reform follows Oregon's lead *Rosenbaum & Burdick praise provision that requires worker accommodation*

SALEM – Two chief sponsors of state legislation to improve workplace conditions for mothers who are breastfeeding praised provisions in the federal health care bill signed into law last week. Inspired by House Bill 2372 from the 2007 session, the federal legislation extends these standards nation-wide. The *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* states that employers with more than 50 employees must provide reasonable, unpaid break time and a private, non-bathroom place for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for one year after the child's birth.

"Oregon's landmark workplace breastfeeding law was a major achievement of the Oregon Women's Health and Wellness Alliance and the Oregon Nursing Mother's Counsel," said Senator Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland), one of two chief House sponsors in 2007. "Oregon has led the nation with a model law that promotes the benefits of breastfeeding."

"The benefits of accommodating breastfeeding are significant for mothers, their children, and employers," said Senator Ginny Burdick (D-Portland), the chief sponsor of the 2007 bill in the Senate. "Lower absenteeism, higher worker morale, and healthier children are in everyone's best interest."

Both legislators praised U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley for his advocacy on this issue during the recent debate on health care reform. Last year, he introduced the "Reasonable Break Time for Nursing Mothers" as an amendment to the Senate HELP Committee's health reform bill that ultimately was signed into law.

"When he served as Speaker of the Oregon House, Senator Merkley was a committed partner in passing Oregon's law on breastfeeding in the workplace," said Rosenbaum. "With his advocacy in D.C., our state now sets the standard for how we protect the rights of nursing mothers in workplaces across the country."

Challenges faced by women breastfeeding in the workplace include: lack of flexibility in work schedule, lack of place to pump, and concerns about support from their employer. Numerous studies show that when new mothers return to the workplace they are less likely to continue breast feeding.

Although the federal law was effective immediately upon President Obama's signing of the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*, the U.S. Department of Labor must now work to define terms and enforcement procedures. Employers, human resources managers, and breastfeeding employees who are interested in helping to establish worksite lactation programs at their place of employment can find

additional information and [Frequently Asked Questions on the United States Breastfeeding Committee Web site](#).

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