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FBC Applauds Workplace Breastfeeding Support Provision in Health Care Reform

Maitland, FL -- The Florida Breastfeeding Coalition (FBC) applauds U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley for including "Reasonable Break Time for Nursing Mothers" as an amendment to the Senate HELP Committee's health reform bill. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act was signed into law on March 23, 2010. Senator Merkley's provision for workplace breastfeeding support states that employers shall provide reasonable, unpaid break time and a private, non-bathroom setting for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for one year after the child's birth. Employers with less than 50 employees are not subject to the requirement if it would cause "undue hardship."

United State Breastfeeding Committee (USBC) Chair and Vice-President of the FBC, Joan Younger Meek, MD, MS, RD, IBCLC, commends the legislation's recognition of breastfeeding as a major preventive health care strategy. "Mothers, babies, and employers all win with breastfeeding support," says Dr. Meek. "Research clearly demonstrates the value of breastfeeding for the health of women *and* children, and medical experts agree with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in recommending exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continued breastfeeding for the first year of life and beyond. But returning to work can be a major hurdle for new mothers struggling to balance work and breastfeeding without the simple support measures this law ensures."

Although many are aware of the health benefits of breastfeeding, employers may not recognize the economic benefits that accrue to them also. *The Business Case for Breastfeeding*, published in 2008 by DHHS, demonstrates an impressive return on investment for employers that provide workplace lactation support, including lower health care costs, absenteeism, and turnover rates. Employees whose companies provide breastfeeding support consistently report improved morale, better satisfaction with their jobs, and higher productivity. As part of *The Business Case for Breastfeeding* initiative, Florida has over 50 trained volunteer outreach workers to assist employers in establishing lactation support programs. Florida's Business Case for Breastfeeding even offers a recognition award program for businesses in Florida who provide lactation support in the workplace.

Dr. Meek says, "It takes little for a company to provide lactation support. Basic needs include a clean place to express milk in privacy and break time to express milk approximately every 3 hours during the work period. A model law in Oregon defines reasonable time for milk expression as 30 minutes for every four hours worked; a good match between natural breastfeeding cycles and the rhythms of the workday." Meek adds, "A growing number of companies across the United States offer worksite lactation programs that also include access to information and professional support from a lactation consultant or other health experts."

Currently, 24 U.S. states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia have legislation related to breastfeeding in the workplace. The new federal provision will provide a minimum level of

support in *all* states, but it will not preempt a state law that provides stronger protections. "This looks to be a strong legal provision, providing for and protecting nursing mothers in the workplace," says labor and employment attorney Thomas Doyle, JD, of Portland's Bennett Hartman Morris and Kaplan. "The implementation of this law will help women care for their babies while contributing to the U.S. workforce."

Although the 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. FBC and USBC will be closely monitoring and supporting this process and stands ready to support employers and breastfeeding employees with tools, information, and resources. Employers, human resources managers, and breastfeeding employees in Florida who are interested in helping to establish worksite lactation programs at their place of employment can find additional information about the *Business Case for Breastfeeding* at the Florida Breastfeeding Coalition's web site <http://flbreastfeeding.org> .

The Florida Breastfeeding Coalition is comprised of individuals who are representatives from several organizations. Opinions expressed by FBC are not necessarily the position of all member organizations and opinions expressed by FBC member organization representatives are not necessarily the position of FBC.

Florida Breastfeeding Coalition, Inc.

The Florida Breastfeeding Coalition (FBC) is a statewide multidisciplinary group of individuals, governmental agencies and organizations with the following mission: **to improve the health of Floridians by working collaboratively to protect, promote and support breastfeeding.** As a statewide coalition, the FBC is registered with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the United States Breastfeeding Committee (USBC) which allows the Coalition to participate in national training seminars and meetings to assist our state in advocacy to minimizing barriers to breastfeeding, and supporting breastfeeding for mothers and babies/children.

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