

Testimony for the Record

HB1440

My name is Bethany Rohrs, a resident of Baltimore City. I am writing in support of HB1440. As a medical professional and a mother of two, I believe this bill is essential to alleviate undue stress to the primary caregiver of young children, better support or excuse individuals summoned to jury duty while breastfeeding. I have firsthand experience being the primary caregiver and sole source of nutrition as a breastfeeding mother.

I have experience serving jury duty while breastfeeding in October of 2022. I found the process difficult and stressful. There are a lot of factors that must be taken into consideration when pumping breastmilk away from your children. Did I bring enough supplies for all my pumping sessions? Is there a clean, sanitary and private place to express breastmilk? Will I be able to keep my breastmilk at a safe temperature all day? Will I be allowed to express milk every 2-3 hours as required to maintain my supply? Will I have access to water or be able to consume water as needed throughout the day to maintain my supply? From my experience, it was difficult to access the lactation room as it required me to travel to another floor with all my pumping supplies, sign in at a desk, wait for an escort to arrive, then travel down another hallway to be let into a back room. It felt as though I spent more time that day getting to and from the lactation room and expressing breastmilk than being present in the juror holding area waiting for my number to be called.

Eventually, my juror number was called to appear in a courtroom. I immediately notified the courtroom staff that I was a breastfeeding mother and would need to pump every 2-3 hours. The staff then approached the judge on my behalf who deemed it too inconvenient to have me in the courtroom as I could delay juror deliberation. Instead of being dismissed for the day, I had to return to the juror holding area for the rest of the day to possibly be called into another courtroom.

Fast forward to Summer of 2024 when I was summoned to serve jury duty in my third trimester in a high-risk pregnancy. When I called the Jury Office, I was told I could be excused but would be summoned again in 6 months despite being postpartum, the primary caregiver of a newborn, and breastfeeding. For these reasons, I am in support of HB1440.

Thank you to the committee for reviewing my testimony and allowing me to share my experience on this matter.