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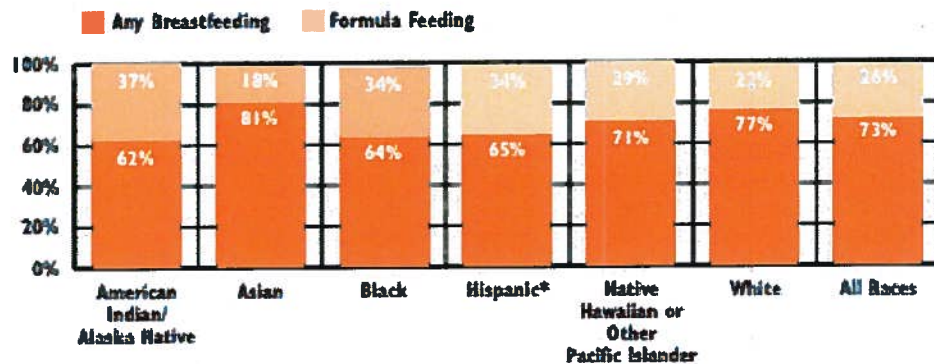
Testimony Re: H-7882 Lactation Consultant Act
House Health and Human Services Committee
March 12, 2024
Kaitlyn Rabb, Policy Analyst

Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 7882. This bill would update the Lactation Consultant Act to include additional lactation professionals who can provide comprehensive equitable breastfeeding supports to address current disparities in breastfeeding rates. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to thank Representative Henries for her leadership in sponsoring this bill and would also like to thank Representatives Stewart, Felix, Morales, Sanchez, Giraldo, Alzate, J. Lombardi, Cotter, and Fogarty for co-sponsoring.

Breastfeeding Rates and Disparities in Rhode Island



Breastfeeding and Formula Feeding at Birth by Race/Ethnicity, Rhode Island, 2017-2021*



Source: Rhode Island Department of Health, Center for Health Data and Analysis, KIDSNET, 2017-2021.
Breastfeeding and formula feeding are defined as intended feeding method at hospital discharge.* Hispanic infants can be of any race. Totals may not sum to 100% because data on feeding methods were not available for all births.

- Between 2017 and 2021, 73% of new mothers in Rhode Island indicated that they intended to breastfeed when discharged from the hospital and 26% intended to formula feed. **There are significant disparities by Race/Ethnicity with Black, Hispanic, and Native American rates being lower than white and Asian rates.**

Importance and Benefits of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is widely recognized as the ideal method of feeding and nurturing infants and is a critical component in achieving optimal infant and child health, growth, and development. National health experts recommend exclusive breastfeeding for six months after birth and continuous breastfeeding for at least 12 months after birth or longer as mutually desired by mother and child. Breastfeeding decreases infant mortality and morbidity. Infant benefits include optimal nutrition, stronger immune systems, and reduced risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and chronic conditions such as asthma, obesity, type 1 diabetes, and ear infections. Breastfeeding benefits mothers by creating a strong bond with infants and decreasing risk for postpartum depression, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension.

Barriers to Breastfeeding for Women and People of Color

American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic infants are less likely to be breastfed than white and Asian infants, due to structural, interpersonal, cultural, and historical barriers that Women of Color face. Structural barriers include lack of support and discrimination from the health care and workplace settings, including limited paid family leave. Interpersonal barriers include lack of family support and inadequate workplace policies for breastfeeding moms. Other barriers to supporting breastfeeding include accessibility and accommodations for lactation in the workplace and community.

Diversifying Lactation Professionals Promotes Health Equity

Lactation consultants can assess breastfeeding difficulties, provide education and support on breastfeeding techniques, assist with breastfeeding equipment and products, help to manage breastfeeding-related medical conditions, and advocate for the needs and rights of breastfeeding parents and infants. Including and supporting Certified Lactation Consultants in Rhode Island's landscape will promote equity in the workforce and in access to care. By removing administrative burdens, more individuals from diverse backgrounds can enter the field and provide valuable support to breastfeeding parents. This can lead to increased rates of successful breastfeeding and better health outcomes for both parents and infants.

Ultimately, promoting equity in lactation consultant licensure can help to ensure that all parents who choose to breastfeed have access to the support they need to make informed decisions about their breastfeeding journey. Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in supporting for breastfeeding for Rhode Island babies and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.