September 8, 2022

Dear Senator Merkley and Representative Maloney:

We are in a notable moment in history, when support for mothers, children and families must be a priority, and responding to the needs of women to support their children is critical. Pope Francis has expressed that he values a feminism which, “does not demand uniformity or negate motherhood,” and has also said, “…the grandeur of women includes all the rights derived from their inalienable human dignity but also from their feminine genius, which is essential to society.”i If our society genuinely values women and the gift of motherhood, it is essential that policies support and accommodate the unique and awe-inspiring nature of maternity.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, for over a century, has worked for the removal of barriers that compound discrimination against women, preventing full and equal opportunities. It is the reason we have advocated in favor of many improved labor laws, and currently support the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA). The PWFA requires employers to provide reasonable pregnancy-related accommodations in the workplace. Similarly, we now urge you to pass the Providing Urgent Maternal Protections (PUMP) for Nursing Mothers Act (S. 1658/H.R. 3110), requiring employers to extend simple accommodations, such as a reasonable break time and a place other than a bathroom, for mothers to express breastmilk at their places of employment.

The benefits of breastfeeding for both mother and child are well-known, especially the vital way by which it provides for a child’s basic right to nutrition. As we have stated before, “Every person has a right to life and to the material and spiritual support required to live a truly human existence. The right to a truly human life logically leads to the right to enough food to sustain a life with dignity.” And yet, 60% of mothers do not breastfeed as long as they intend.ii This is due to various factors, one of which is unsupportive workplace policies.iii Congress can significantly improve workplace policies for millions of women by passing the PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act. Congress approved similar bill language in 2010 under the Break Time for Nursing Mothers Act. Congress approved the law, millions of mothers were left unprotected. We encourage Congress to correct the inadvertent exclusion of these women.

In addressing the topic of breastfeeding, Saint John Paul II said, “So human and natural is this bond that the Psalms use the image of the infant at its mother’s breast as a picture of God’s care for man.”iv Especially in light of the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision in Dobbs v. Jackson, we must find more ways to support mothers and children. Please pass the PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act during this session of Congress to protect and honor the right of a mother to nurse her child.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Archbishop of Baltimore
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities