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Senator McEwen  
St. Paul, MN 55155

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Senator McEwen:

My name is Megan Peterson and I am the Executive Director of Gender Justice. Gender Justice is a legal and policy advocacy organization dedicated to advancing gender equity through the law. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SF 1018.

In 2014, Gender Justice helped to craft and supported passage of the Women's Economic Security Act (or WESA). Last year, our former Advocacy Director was proud to serve as co-chair of the Attorney General's Advisory Task Force on Expanding the Economic Security of Women. Gender Justice strongly supports the recommendations laid out in the Task Force's report, several of which are being put into action here in this bill.

To illustrate why these changes to WESA are so important, I'd like to share the story of a former Gender Justice client who I'll call Rebecca. Rebecca gave birth to her daughter in October, 2016, and like many new mothers, she chose to breastfeed. Rebecca had left her job on good terms and was ready to go back to work after four months' leave. Unfortunately, Rebecca's managers refused her adequate time or a private space to use a breast pump. The lack of support for her pumping needs resulted in significant stress, physical pain, and a rapidly diminishing milk supply. The mental and physical strain took a toll not only on Rebecca, but also on her infant daughter, who dropped from the 25th to just under the 2nd weight percentile during this period.

Rebecca found herself in a double bind – being a nursing mother jeopardized her job, and being a working mother jeopardized her ability to nurse. Rebecca ultimately decided she had no choice but to quit her job for the sake of her and her daughter's health. No new parent should be put in the untenable position of choosing between her job and her child's wellbeing.

SF 1018 will strengthen the protections for nursing parents like Rebecca and others by ensuring no employees are left out of WESA's crucial protections – including those working at small employers.

New parents like Rebecca often struggle to find information about their rights in the midst of the challenges of new parenthood especially when compounded by a lack of support at work. They will benefit from the bill's requirement for employers to proactively inform employees of pregnancy and nursing accommodations upon hire and when the employee requests parental leave.

Minnesota has the second-highest rate of working mothers in the country, and almost nine out of ten new mothers in the state breastfeed at some point. Protecting the rights of breast and chestfeeding parents in the workplace is crucial for reducing gender inequity, including closing the pay gap for women. SF 1018 is an important step towards ensuring Minnesota meets our goals of supporting pregnant and parenting workers. Thank you for your support.