



Maine Equal Justice  
People Policy Solutions

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**Testimony in Support of LD 85, An Act Concerning MaineCare Coverage for Donor Breast Milk  
(Sponsored by Representative Margaret Craven)**

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Kathy Kilrain del Rio. I'm the Director of Campaigns and Health Care Advocacy for Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. We support LD 85, *An Act Concerning MaineCare Coverage for Donor Breast Milk*. I am testifying today on behalf of my colleague, Brandi Collins who couldn't be here today and wanted to share her personal experience as a mom whose child was born 8 weeks prematurely. The rest of my testimony is her words.

On the morning of April 20, 2018, I received the news that no mother wants to hear. I was told that my unborn infant daughter was in distress and that I would need to be prepped for an Emergency C-Section. I was only 31 weeks pregnant. On April 20, 2018 at 9:50am, my daughter, Harper Grae Collins was born, weighing in at only 2lbs 8oz. Harper was immediately taken to the NICU after she was born, and placed on a breathing machine. I was told that Harper would most likely be in the hospital until her due date, which was June 17<sup>th</sup>.

I don't believe that any mother is prepared for the long, stressful road ahead of having an infant in the NICU. Seeing your child hooked up to so many machines and wires was not something I was prepared for. Harper was placed on a feeding tube because due to her prematurity she did not yet have the muscle coordination to breastfeed.

During this time, I was not able to hold Harper and breastfeed her, so I spent most of my time sitting next to her incubator pumping breastmilk to keep my supply for when she was strong enough to try breastfeeding. Before having Harper, I had read all the benefits of breastmilk, and had always planned to breastfeed, so it was very upsetting for me when this was not a possibility. Due to my daughter being so small she only required small amounts of breastmilk, so during her hospital stay I was able to provide that for her along with supplementation of donor milk that was provided.

Unfortunately, when she came home, I was not able to keep up with the demands of exclusively pumping as she required more calories and quantity in order to continue gaining weight. My husband and I both were both working and had a toddler. My supply began to dwindle, and I knew that I would not be able to provide her with breastmilk for much longer. I researched buying donor milk and found that it was very expensive and knew I couldn't afford this as a long-term solution, so I turned to an online community of mothers willing to donate their milk.

I was very fortunate to find a mother whom I trusted and connected with who was able to provide me with enough breastmilk to supply Harper until she was over a year old. Although I was able to find a wonderful donor, there are many safety risks associated with mother-to-mother milk sharing.

For parents coping with the birth of a premature baby, there are many factors that make it difficult or impossible to produce adequate breast milk to meet their child's nutritional needs. Their body may not have been ready to produce milk, they are coping with a great deal of stress and exhaustion while their child is in the NICU, and often they are balancing the care of their tiny baby with work, caring for other children, and even traveling long distances to the hospital. For these parents, donated breast milk is an important option. However, for parents with low-income, that option is often financially out of reach. While the challenges faced by parents of full-term babies are different from those I've described, donated breast milk can still make a big difference in those babies' health. And those benefits shouldn't be denied to low-income families who are already struggling to make ends meet.

For all these reasons, I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 85. For some families, donor breast milk can have a big impact in a child's health and those families with MaineCare coverage need to be able to access this important resource. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.