

27th February, 2007

The Secretary of the Committee on Breastfeeding
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

I am the mother of a 2 ½ year old daughter, who is still breastfeeding. I have experienced the benefits of breast feeding; not only the outstanding physical and mental development of my child, but the emotional satisfaction for us both, through bonding. Although my daughter is approaching her third birthday, she shows no signs of wanting to wean. Various people, including health professionals have advised me to wean, as they believe that a child who can walk, talk and eat a meal should not be on the breast. I know that the research proves this to be untrue, and have decided to let my child make the weaning decision. Because breastfeeding has been such a positive experience for me, I would like all mothers to experience similar success.

I feel compelled to make a submission to the enquiry, to share some information, of which the committee may or may not be aware. On reading the terms of reference, I think that (e) 'examine the effectiveness of current measures to promote breastfeeding' would most closely relate to my submission. This story demonstrates how effective current practices in the Family Court can be in discouraging breastfeeding, and denigrating mothers who practice extended breastfeeding.

Approximately one year ago, when my child was not quite two years, my former husband went to the court to request new access arrangements. The Federal judge queried why I was not offering overnights with the father. My lawyer explained that the child was breastfed and co-sleeps with her mother. She produced affidavits from a lactation consultant and paediatrician, as well as literature from WHO, which supported my position.

The judge refused to read the affidavits and literature, and stated that he had made court orders in the past for a child to be "put on a bottle" to enable overnight access for fathers. When I reported the proceedings to the paediatrician, he stated that, by rejecting and overriding expert opinion, he demonstrated bias. It amazes me that the Federal Government supports a system where a person with such power to terminate breastfeeding, is not required to possess knowledge of the subject, and can refuse to learn from experts.

The paediatrician suggested that although matters in the Family Court are regarded as confidential, this behaviour should be reported in the media, as it has the potential to do so much harm to mothers and babies. I did not act on his suggestion, but on reflection, I believe I should have done so. It disturbs me to think of others who have obviously been in my position and walked away with a court order to wean. I would like the committee to think seriously of the impact that family breakup, which leads to Family Court proceedings, can have on a mother and child's right to breastfeed.

Thanking you,
Christina Bailey