

Guide to the Rights of Breastfeeding

Employees in Oklahoma

Purpose: This guide was developed to provide an overview of the laws that protect the rights of breastfeeding employees in Oklahoma to express breast milk during the workday. The factors that are addressed and the level of protection provided vary widely from one law to another. The chart below details the Oklahoma and federal laws that impact breastfeeding employees, and the protections those laws provide for each listed component. Components that are not addressed by the law are shaded in gray.

How to Use This Guide: To identify your rights as a breastfeeding employee or obligations as an employer, you must first determine which of the laws apply to you. Then compare each part of the applicable laws. If an employee is covered by more than one law, and those laws address the same component, the employee is entitled to the strongest protection available. If an employer does not provide the required accommodations, a complaint can be filed with the regulatory agency. The agency responsible for enforcement of each law and information on how to file a complaint is included in the chart.

The template was developed to address every component considered in existing state and federal workplace lactation accommodation laws. Some components may not apply to your state.

Where to Go for Help: Many breastfeeding coalitions provide support for employees and employers. See the [Coalition of Oklahoma Breastfeeding Advocates website](#) or visit the U.S. Breastfeeding Committee [Coalitions Directory](#) for a list of all breastfeeding coalitions.

Important Note: The information provided in this guide is not legal advice. Legal advice is dependent upon the specific circumstances of each situation. Check with a lawyer or the regulatory agency if you believe your rights have been violated.

Oklahoma Law:

[Oklahoma Stat. tit. 40, § 435](#)

- A. An employer may provide reasonable unpaid break time each day to an employee who needs to breast-feed or express breast milk for her child to maintain milk supply and comfort. The break time, if possible, shall run concurrently with any break time, paid or unpaid, already provided to the employee. An employer is not required to provide break time under this section if to do so would create an undue hardship on the operations of the employer.
- B. An employer may make a reasonable effort to provide a private, secure, and sanitary room or other location in close proximity to the work area, other than a toilet stall, where an employee can express her milk or breast-feed her child.
- C. The Department of Health shall issue periodic reports on breast-feeding rates, complaints received, and benefits reported by both working breast-feeding mothers and employers.
- D. As used in this section:
 1. "Employer" means a person engaged in business who has one or more employees, including the state and any political subdivision of the state;
 2. "Employee" means any person engaged in service to an employer in the business of the employer;
 3. "Reasonable efforts" means any effort that would not impose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer's business; and
 4. "Undue hardship" means any action that requires significant difficulty or expense when considered in relation to factors such as the size of the business, its financial resources, and the nature and structure of its operation.

Resources:

- [The Oklahoma State Courts Network:](#)
 - [Statutory language:](#) full text of Okla. Stat. tit. 40, § 435

Federal Laws:

[Section 7\(r\) of the Fair Labor Standards Act – Break Time for Nursing Mothers Provision:](#)

(r)(1) An employer shall provide—

A. a reasonable break time for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for 1 year after the child's birth each time such employee has need to express the milk; and

B. a place, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public, which may be used by an employee to express breast milk.

(2) An employer shall not be required to compensate an employee receiving reasonable break time under paragraph (1) for any work time spent for such purpose.

(3) An employer that employs less than 50 employees shall not be subject to the requirements of this subsection, if such requirements would impose an undue hardship by causing the employer significant difficulty or expense when considered in relation to the size, financial resources, nature, or structure of the employer's business.

(4) Nothing in this subsection shall preempt a State law that provides greater protections to employees than the protections provided for under this subsection.

Resources:

- [United States Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division](#) (WHD):
 - [Statutory language](#): full text of the "Break Time for Nursing Mothers" law.
 - [Fact Sheet #73](#): includes information on general requirements, time and location of breaks, and coverage and compensation requirements under the "Break Time for Nursing Mothers" law.
 - [FAQs](#): answers many questions about the law.

[Title VII of the Civil Rights Act:](#) The Pregnancy Discrimination Act, passed in 1978, amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to prohibit sex discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions. In 2013, the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit held that firing a woman because she is lactating or expressing milk is unlawful sex discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.

Title VII states:

(a) Employer practices

It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer -

(1) to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; or

(2) to limit, segregate, or classify his employees or applicants for employment in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.

(k) The terms 'because of sex' or 'on the basis of sex' include, but are not limited to, because of or on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; and women affected by pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions shall be treated the same for all employment-related purposes, including receipt of benefits under fringe benefit programs, as other persons not so affected but similar in their ability or inability to work, and nothing in section 703(h) of this title shall be interpreted to permit otherwise. This subsection shall not require an employer to pay for health insurance benefits for abortion, except where the life of the mother would be endangered if the fetus were carried to term, or except where medical complications have arisen from an abortion: Provided, That nothing herein shall preclude an employer from providing abortion benefits or otherwise affect bargaining agreements in regard to abortion.

Resources:

- [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#):
 - [The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978](#): statutory language of amendment to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.
 - [Pregnancy Discrimination](#): webpage detailing prohibited treatment of employees impacted by pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions.
 - [Enforcement Guidance: Pregnancy Discrimination and Related Issues](#): guidance regarding the Pregnancy Discrimination Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act as they apply to pregnant workers. The Enforcement Guidance states that there are various circumstances in which discrimination against a female employee who is lactating or breastfeeding can implicate Title VII. Because lactation is a pregnancy-related medical condition, less favorable treatment of a lactating employee may raise an inference of unlawful

discrimination. An employee must have the same freedom to address lactation-related needs that she and her co-workers would have to address other similarly limiting medical conditions.

	State: Oklahoma Stat. tit. 40, § 435	Federal: Break Time for Nursing Mothers Law	Federal: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act
Eligible Employees	Employers are encouraged to provide accommodations for any employee who needs to breast-feed or express breast milk for her child.	Nursing mothers who are employees covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and not exempt from FLSA overtime pay requirements. Important note: if an employer is not covered by the FLSA, its employees may still be covered if the employee's own duties meet certain interstate commerce requirements.	Title VII protects employees of private and state and local government employers with 15 or more employees, labor organizations, employment agencies, and apprenticeship and training programs. Title VII also applies to employees in the federal sector.
Are Employers Required to Have a Policy on Breastfeeding Employees?			No policy is required under Title VII. However, if an employer allows employees to take breaks, change their schedules, or use sick leave for routine doctor appointments and to address non-incapacitating medical conditions, then it must allow female employees to change their schedules or use sick leave for lactation-related needs under similar circumstances. Or, if an employer freely permits employees to use break time for personal reasons, it would violate Title VII to deny break time for expressing breast milk.
Frequency of Milk Expression Breaks	Reasonable to maintain milk supply and comfort. The break time, if possible, shall run concurrently with any break time, paid or unpaid, already provided to the employee.	As frequently as needed by the nursing mother. The frequency of breaks needed to express breast milk will likely vary.	
Length of Time for Milk Expression Breaks	Reasonable to maintain milk supply and comfort.	Reasonable. The duration of each break will likely vary.	
Duration of Milk Expression Breaks	No limit.	1 year after the child's birth.	
Space Requirements	An employer may make a reasonable effort to provide a private, secure, and sanitary room or other location in close proximity to the work area, other than a toilet stall, where an employee can express her milk or breast-feed her child.	A place, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public, which may be used by an employee to express breast milk. The location provided must be functional as a space for expressing breast milk.	

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		If the space is not dedicated to the nursing mothers' use, it must be available when needed in order to meet the statutory requirement. Of course, employers may choose to create permanent, dedicated space if they determine that is the best way to meet their obligations under the law.	
Pay Requirement	Unpaid, unless concurrent with paid breaks.	Unpaid , unless concurrent with paid breaks . If a nursing employee is not completely relieved from duty during a break to express breast milk, the time must be compensated as work time.	
Are Employers Required to Notify Employees of Their Rights?			Employers are required to post the "EEO is the Law" English poster . <i>Note: This notice does not specifically address the rights of breastfeeding employees.</i>
Requirements for Employees			
Exemption	An employer is not required to provide break time under this section if to do so would create an undue hardship on the operations of the employer. "Undue hardship" means any action that requires significant difficulty or expense when considered in relation to factors such as the size of the business, its financial resources, and the nature and structure of its operation.	All employers covered by the FLSA , regardless of the size of their business, are required to comply with this provision. However, employers with fewer than 50 employees are not subject to the FLSA break time requirement if the employer can demonstrate that compliance with the provision would impose an undue hardship. Whether compliance would be an undue hardship is determined by looking at the difficulty or expense of compliance for a specific employer in comparison to the size, financial resources, nature, or structure of the employer's business.	
Milk Storage			
Does Unpaid Break Time Impact Full Time Status and/or Eligibility for Health Insurance?			
Is Unpaid Break Time Expressly Separated from Paid Leave or Paid Time Off?			

	State: Oklahoma Stat. tit. 40, § 435	Federal: Break Time for Nursing Mothers Law	Federal: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act
Are Employers Required to Consider Providing Additional Accommodations for Breastfeeding Employees?			
Discrimination/ Retaliation		It is a violation for any person to discharge or in any other manner discriminate against an employee who files a complaint or cooperates with the investigation of a complaint.	Firing a woman or taking other adverse employment action against her because she is lactating or expressing milk is unlawful sex discrimination. An employer may not discriminate against an employee because of her breastfeeding schedule. Women breastfeeding and lactating must be able to take breaks as other employees who take breaks for other medical or personal reasons. Employers are prohibited from firing, demoting, harassing or otherwise retaliating against an employee because she has complained of discrimination or participated in an employment discrimination proceeding.
Protection from Harassment			Employers are required to provide a work environment free of harassment based on pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions, including breastfeeding.
Agency Responsible for Enforcement	Oklahoma Office of the Department of Labor.	U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division .	U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.
How to File a Complaint	File a complaint by calling the U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division office Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Oklahoma City office: 405-231-4158 Tulsa office: 918-581-6303. After hours complaints can be filed by calling the WHD toll-free hotline at 1-800-487-9243 or visiting www.dol.gov/whd .	File a complaint by calling the WHD toll-free at 1-800-487-9243 or visiting www.dol.gov/whd . You will then be directed to your nearest WHD office for assistance.	You may file a charge of employment discrimination at the EEOC office closest to where you live, or at any one of the EEOC's 53 field offices . You may call 1-800-669-4000 or visit the EEOC website for more information on filing a charge and filing deadlines. Important Note: Federal sector employees have a different complaint process .

	State: Oklahoma Stat. tit. 40, § 435	Federal: Break Time for Nursing Mothers Law	Federal: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act
Is the Agency Required to Monitor and Compile Enforcement Reports?	The agency is not required to compile enforcement reports, however, the Department of Health shall issue periodic reports on breast-feeding rates, complaints received, and benefits reported by both working breast-feeding mothers and employers.		Yes.
Sanctions for Non-Compliance		An employee whose rights are denied can file a complaint with the Wage and Hour Division, which can go to court to obtain an order requiring the employer to comply. In addition, any employee who is “discharged or in any other manner discriminated against” because, for instance, he or she has filed a complaint or cooperated in an investigation, may file a retaliation complaint with the Wage and Hour Division or may file a private cause of action seeking appropriate remedies including, but not limited to, employment, reinstatement, lost wages and an additional equal amount as liquidated damages.	Remedies may include reinstatement, compensatory damages, punitive damages, back pay for lost wages where someone has been terminated, and requiring an employer to take certain actions to prevent future discrimination.
Do Employees Have Private Action Rights?	Yes.	Yes.	Yes, but employees are first required to file a charge with the EEOC.
Worksite Designation Program	Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite Project Minimum designation requirements: - Flexible break times for expression of milk - A comfortable location allowing privacy for pumping, other than a toilet stall - Access to a nearby clean water source and a sink for washing hands and rinsing out any breastpump equipment - Written policy supporting breastfeeding that includes the above minimum requirements and a description of how all staff are informed of this policy <i>Note: designation is not required under Oklahoma law.</i>		
Additional Resources	Contact the Oklahoma State Department of Health at 1-888-655-2942 to have information	Office on Women’s Health: - Supporting Nursing Moms at Work: Employer Solutions	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission:

	State: Oklahoma Stat. tit. 40, § 435	Federal: Break Time for Nursing Mothers Law	Federal: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act
	<p>about current laws and Oklahoma Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite recognition sent to your employer.</p> <p>Coalition of Oklahoma Breastfeeding Advocates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Breastfeeding Laws - Employer Resources - Returning to Work - Breastfeeding Laws Wallet Cards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English - Español <p>Oklahoma State Department of Health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Breastfeeding Information & Support - Oklahoma Breastfeeding Hotline: 1-877-271-MILK (6455) - Línea de Ayuda para la Lactancia en Oklahoma <p>U.S. Department of Labor Women’s Bureau: Employment Protections For Workers Who Are Pregnant or Nursing</p> <p>Okla. Stat. Ann. tit. 25, §1301-1302 prohibits discrimination based on sex, which includes, but is not limited to, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions. Women affected by pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions shall be treated the same for all employment-related purposes as other persons not so affected but similar in their ability or inability to work, and therefore would require accommodations for pregnant women under similar circumstances that Title VII requires.</p>	<p>- Business Case for Breastfeeding</p> <p>U.S. Breastfeeding Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resource and Referral Guide for Breastfeeding Employees and their Employers - Online Guide: “What You Need to Know About the “Break Time for Nursing Mothers” Law <p>Especially see Online Guide sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How should you store your breast milk? - What are the space requirements? <p>Wage and Hour Division: Family and Medical Leave Act</p> <p>Center for WorkLife Law:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pregnant @ Work - Guide for doctors on writing work notes for nursing mothers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidance: Questions and Answers about the EEOC’s Enforcement Guidance on Pregnancy Discrimination and Related Issues - Press release: Fifth Circuit Holds Lactation Discrimination is Unlawful Sex Discrimination <p>National Women’s Law Center: Fact Sheet: The Pregnancy Discrimination Act and the Amended Americans with Disabilities Act: Working Together to Protect Pregnant Workers</p> <p>American Civil Liberties Union: Federal Law and Pregnant, Post-Partum and Breastfeeding Workers</p> <p>A Better Balance: Babygate</p>

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