

Adapted by: BaBE – Building a Breastfeeding Environment

Breastfeeding & Your Rights

A Guide for Self Advocacy

Adapted from the Community Breastfeeding Alliance of Waterloo Region (June 2012)



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The two sample letters are also available in Word format for customizing. They can be found on the Self-Advocacy page of the website www.babens.ca or by contacting badenovascotia@gmail.com

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The original resource was developed by the Community Breastfeeding Alliance of Waterloo Region (June 2012) but has been adapted by Zahra Batool on behalf of BaBE to be applicable to the Antigonish-Guysborough-Strait region.

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Introduction

This package was created to help breastfeeding families advocate for their breastfeeding rights. In Nova Scotia, the right of mothers to breastfeed anytime and anywhere is protected under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Code. Asking a breastfeeding mother to move to a new location, stop breastfeeding, or cover up is a violation of these rights. Information about your breastfeeding rights can be found on the [Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission](#) website. The revised Nova Scotia Provincial Breastfeeding Policy will soon be available as an additional resource (2005 version can be found [here](#)).

While BaBE: Building a Breastfeeding Environment cannot advocate on an individual's behalf, this package may help you to understand your human right to breastfeed your children and take action to protect this right.

What options do you have when your breastfeeding rights are violated in a **privately-owned** space?

Examples of a privately-owned space include malls, restaurants, churches, airplanes or childcare centers.

Being asked to stop breastfeeding, cover up or move is a violation of your human right to breastfeed – a right which is protected under the [Nova Scotia Human Rights Code](#). The information below can be used to direct you as to whom to contact about your experience. We have included sample letters in this package that you can adapt to suit your own situation.

Option 1: Contact the manager and/or owner of the business or institution

- In some cases, this could be the store manager, church pastor or executive director
- It might also be the business owner, the owner of a building or a café owner

Option 2: Contact the head office of a large business or institution

- Sometimes the head office of a large business or institution is a more appropriate place to direct a letter as they are more likely to have the authority to make the changes you request

Option 3: Contact the media & share your story (e.g. newspaper, radio, television)

- Here are some possible contacts:
 - [The Casket](#): (902) 863-4370
 - [The Guysborough Journal](#): (902) 533-2750
 - [The Reporter](#): (902) 625-3300
 - [The Highland Heart](#) (902) 783-2114
 - [The Chronicle Herald](#): (902) 426-2811
 - [98.9 XFM](#): (902) 863-4580
 - [93.3 The Fox](#): (902) 867-2410
 - [101.5 The Hawk](#): (902) 625-1220

Option 4: Contact your government representative at the municipal (local), provincial or federal level. They might be able to advocate on your behalf.

- Here are some websites to help you find the appropriate representative:
 - [Antigonish Town Council](#)
 - [Guysborough Town Council](#)

- [Port Hawkesbury Town Council](#)
- [Municipality of Richmond County](#)
- [Local Member of Provincial Parliament \(MPP\)](#)
- [Local Member of Parliament \(Federal MP\)](#)

Option 5: Contact the Human Rights Commission of Nova Scotia

The Human Rights Commission of Nova Scotia deals directly with all claims of discrimination filed under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Code. The Human Rights Commission of Nova Scotia has forms you must fill out in order to make an official human rights complaint. You can get legal advice and assistance from the [Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission](#). You will need to have your questions ready before calling. **All letters must be sent in within 1 year of the event in question.**

Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission

Phone: (902) 424-4111

Phone (toll-free): 1 (877) 269-7699

Phone (TTY): (902) 424-3139

For information about your breastfeeding rights, contact above.

What options do you have when your breastfeeding rights are violated in a public space?

Examples of a public space include parks, swimming pools, arenas, community centres, schools, or town halls.

Being asked to stop breastfeeding, cover up or move is a violation of your human right to breastfeed – a right which is protected under the [Nova Scotia Human Rights Code](#). The information below can be used to direct you as to whom to contact about your experience. We have included sample letters in this package that you can adapt to suit your own situation.

Option 1: Contact the manager of the location

- In some cases, this could be a park manager, a school principal, or a head lifeguard

Option 2: Contact the head office, the department manager or director or the regional school board

- Here are some possible contacts:
 - [Strait Regional School Board](#): (902) 625-2281
 - [Canada Parks](#): 1 (888) 773-8888
 - [Nova Scotia Parks](#): (902) 662-3030

Option 3: Contact your government representative at the municipal (local), provincial or federal level. They might be able to advocate on your behalf.

- Here are some websites to help you find the appropriate representative:
 - [Antigonish Town Council](#)
 - [Guysborough Town Council](#)
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Option 5: Contact the media & share your story (ex. newspaper, radio, television)

- Here are some possible contacts:
 - [The Casket](#): (902) 863-4370
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 - [The Highland Heart](#) (902) 783-2114
 - [The Chronicle Herald](#): (902) 426-2811
 - [98.9 XFM](#): (902) 863-4580
 - [93.3 The Fox](#): (902) 867-2410
 - [101.5 The Hawk](#): (902) 625-1220

What options do you have when your breastfeeding rights are violated at **work**?

Employers are obligated to follow the Nova Scotia Human Rights Code as described in Section 2.5.2 of the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission policy “[Breastfeeding](#)”. You have a right to breastfeed or express milk at work. The information below can be used to direct you as to whom to contact about your experience. This package includes sample letters that you can adapt to suit your own situation.

Does your workplace have a breastfeeding policy?

Your place of work may have a breastfeeding policy. If there is one and it protects your needs and rights, this will help you to communicate with your supervisor or manager. If your workplace does not have a breastfeeding policy, [Make Breastfeeding Your Business](#), which is a provincial initiative that helps businesses, organization and municipalities adopt breastfeeding-friendly practice, offers advice and support for creating a breastfeeding-friendly workplace.

Option 1: Talk with you direct supervisor

- Review your rights and bring Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission and/or *Make Breastfeeding Your Business* documents for support.

Option 2: Talk with management or the business owners

- Review your rights and bring Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission documents for support.

Option 3: Contact the Human Rights Commission of Nova Scotia

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Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission

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For information about your breastfeeding rights, contact above.

What options do you have when your breastfeeding rights are violated as a **patient** of a healthcare service?

Examples of health care locations include hospitals, clinics, home-care, dental offices, doctors' offices.

Examples of health care providers include physicians/specialists, dentists, nurses, pharmacists or technicians.

Breastfeeding mothers may see health care providers for many reasons – to obtain prenatal care related to a new pregnancy, to plan and undergo medical testing related to an illness or condition, or during routine health care services. If a health care provider recommends, or expects you to stop breastfeeding for a period of time or to stop breastfeeding completely, it is within your rights to request the current medical research or professional documents supporting this advice and/or request. The following information can be used to direct you as to whom to contact about understanding and advocating for your right to breastfeed. Sample letters are included in this package that you can adapt and use to suit your own situation.

The following resources provide information about breastfeeding and risks related to healthcare:

- [MotherRisk](#)
- [InfantRisk](#)
- [LactMed](#)
- [Organization of Teratology Information Specialists \(OTIS\)](#)

In addition, the following professional best practice documents or statements from health associations may be of help:

- [Health Canada](#) and [Public Health Agency of Canada](#)
- [Canadian Pediatric Society](#)
- [Canadian Pharmacists Association](#)
- [Best Practice Guidelines - RNAO](#)

Option 1: Talk with the healthcare provider, their office, and/or the floor or unit supervisor.

Option 2: Contact the college of the healthcare provider (they investigate complaints against their members)

- [College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia](#)

- [Nova Scotia Dental Association](#)
- [College of Physicians & Surgeons of Nova Scotia](#)
- [Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists](#)
- [Nova Scotia Association of Medical Radiation Technologists](#)
- [Midwife Regulatory Council of Nova Scotia](#)

Option 3: Send a letter to the head office of location management if applicable (for example, hospital administration, pharmacy, store or clinic head office).

Sample Breastfeeding Advocacy Letter for General Situations

Name

Contact Information

Date

Attention: [Individual/Office/Department/Organization]

I am writing to express my concern regarding a recent experience at **[your facility/with your organization]**. I expect to receive a response within a reasonable amount of time that includes a plan of action regarding this incident in order to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

- ***Describe what happened***

(For example: On April 7, 2014, I was sitting on a bench at the mall breastfeeding my son. An employee approached and asked that I “cover up” or move to a private lounge...etc. This experience was both embarrassing and uncomfortable for me and my family.)

As a breastfeeding mother living in Nova Scotia, my baby and I are protected against discrimination by human rights legislation. I have the right to breastfeed my child at anytime and anywhere. No one has the right to ask me to move or cover up while I am feeding my baby. This legislation can be found on the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission website (<http://humanrights.gov.ns.ca/>) within the document “[Breastfeeding](#)”. My experience at your organization demonstrates a violation of these rights.

- ***Describe what you would like to see happen as a result of your letter***

(For example: As a result of this incident, I hope that in the future, employees will be educated regarding breastfeeding rights and appropriate responses to breastfeeding mothers. In addition, creating breastfeeding-friendly policies and procedures, such as what staff should do if a customer complains about a breastfeeding mother, will help to prevent such problems in the future. I strongly urge you to develop one that suits your organization and its needs.)

Breastfeeding makes an invaluable contribution to the health of both mothers and babies. Every effort must be made to respect our rights and make breastfeeding a comfortable experience for families like mine. I ask that you address my situation and help to make our community breastfeeding-friendly. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

[Breastfeeding mother]

CC: Include the names of the people or organization that you believe should know about your letter and be sure to send them a copy.

Sample Breastfeeding Advocacy Letter for Healthcare Situations

Name

Contact Information

Date

Attention: [Healthcare professional/dept/office]

I am writing to express my concern regarding a recent experience at **[your facility/with your organization]**. I expect to receive a response within a reasonable amount of time that includes a plan of action regarding this incident in order to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

- ***Describe what happened***

(For example: On April 7, 2014, I was scheduled for a CT scan with contrast. The physician immediately notified me that I needed to stop breastfeeding. In the days leading up to the procedure, I felt powerless and conflicted as the professionals at the clinic dismissed my desire to continue breastfeeding. As a new mother, I felt confused and fearful for the health of my baby...etc.)

I expect all healthcare professionals to follow current best practices. There are a wide range of professional, research-based documents that provide evidence to support breastfeeding, even while the mother is experiencing most procedures or taking medications. In other cases, when breastfeeding must be temporarily interrupted, current best practice indicates the healthcare providers should facilitate pumping to maintain milk supply. It is clear, however, that these best practices were not followed in my situation. The following professional documents outline current best practices:

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario: [Breastfeeding Best Practice Guidelines](#)

MotherRisk (Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto): [Breastfeeding & Drugs](#)

I strongly believe all infants deserve the chance to develop and feed normally, and any practice that threatens breastfeeding impacts their well-being. Please support infants and families by taking a firm position for breastfeeding promotion. I look forward to receiving a detailed response outlining how your practice will change to prevent similar situations in the future.

Sincerely,

[Breastfeeding mother]

CC: Include the names of the people or organization that you believe should know about your letter and be sure to send them a copy.