

? Ask Pat

Ask Pat is a feature provided by the Committee on Women and the Profession. This is a question and answer column with a twist. "Pat" will answer questions about gender bias in the legal profession. Letters are loosely based on real events. Send comments or letters to Ask Pat, State Bar of New Mexico, PO Box 92860, Albuquerque, NM 87199-2860.

Dear Pat,

I am a practicing attorney and new mother. I took some time off after the birth of my child but will be returning to work very soon. I would like to continue breastfeeding, but I am a little uncomfortable about pumping at work. I'm not familiar with the new legislation about pumping in the workplace. Please help.

*Sincerely,
Nursing in Albuquerque*

Dear Nursing,

You should not feel uncomfortable. The legislature and most of society finds that breastfeeding a baby is an important, natural and nurturing act that should be encouraged in the interests of the health of the mother, child and family values.

New Mexico has allowed breastfeeding in any "public or private location" since 1999, but for breastfeeding women this often meant having to use the office bathroom. With the passage of HB613, employers must now provide a space for using breast pumps which "is clean and private; near the employee's workspace; and **not a bathroom.**" In addition, your firm must allow you to have "flexible break times." (HB613).

Jacie Coryell, a lactation consultant with the New Mexico Breastfeeding Taskforce, suggests the following:

- 1) Find a place where you can close the door. Coryell suggests unused offices if your own is inappropriate.
- 2) Optimally, you should be able to lock the door.
- 3) You should have a large enough space near a sink.
- 4) There are several types of pumps, but in general, the more expensive pumps are quieter.
- 5) Adjust your schedule for the time you need.

Pat suggests that you drop by the office before returning to work to find an acceptable place. If you need assistance, sometimes a fellow coworker/office manager can be helpful and discreet.

Prior planning will also help your court proceedings go smoothly. So that you do not find yourself in the awkward position of having to explain your breaks during a proceeding, alert the judge's office beforehand. You might also check beforehand to be sure there is an appropriate room you can use. Keep in mind that attorneys should be mindful to make similar arrangements for their nursing clients.

Employers do not have to provide a refrigerator. If you do not have one or you feel uncomfortable using the lunch area fridge, bring a cooler.

Many professional women are able to return to work while enjoying raising their children. Suggestions about nursing are available by calling La Leche League at (505) 821-2511.

Best of luck to you in balancing the needs of your child and the practice of law.

*Sincerely,
Pat*