



Julia with a 'G'

Giulia Jones MLA

Member for Molonglo
Shadow Minister for Women
Shadow Minister for Mental Health
Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs

Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Procedure
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary, Dr Andrew Southcott MP, and other committee members,

I am so pleased to have read that you are undertaking a review of the treatment of breastfeeding mothers in your parliament. I applaud you for having the courage to come up with a modern method of supporting women's breastfeeding aspirations and babies' feeding needs.

No one wants to make this a big issue. However, it goes to the intersection of women's aspirations for work and for family, which I think all sides of politics supports today.

I am a mother of five children under the age of 10 and a Member of the ACT Legislative Assembly. I am the Shadow Minister for Women, Multicultural Affairs, and Mental Health.

I returned to work soon after the birth of each of my children, except for one. Sometime after that child was born, I headed right into an election campaign. In previous roles, when I have returned to work, I have been predominately desk-based and so working with a baby in the workplace has been relatively straight forward.

I was able to, in previous roles, demand-feed my babies by taking the baby off to a breastfeeding room or lounge area, when he or she needed feeding. In between feeds, work was relatively straight forward as new born babies sleep much of the time and make very little noise.

I was elected to the ACT Legislative Assembly in 2012, and in April of this year, my youngest child was born. I found that coming back to the ACT Legislative Assembly with a young baby placed an additional demand on me. At times, I was needed in the chamber when my baby was hungry. The bells would ring and I would have to decide if I should make the baby wait, or take him down into the chamber to be fed. It is a stressful business to manage babies' breastfeeding needs, a mother's not-ending milk supply, and the physical demands of being a politician.

I felt privileged to have a good job with flexibility and I wish more women had such circumstances while having the next generation of children. When I am expected to be in the chamber for votes, I

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may bring my baby with me only if I am feeding him. Whereas my understanding is that in the House of Representatives, breastfeeding mothers can only opt to stay in their office to breastfeed and vote by proxy. I find it astounding that, in the modern era, both groups of women, be they in the House of Representatives or in the ACT Legislative Assembly, are being told what they may and may not do with a breastfed baby.

In fact, on one of the occasions I breast fed my baby in the chamber, my baby did cry a little. It was not a disruption to the operations of Parliament. In fact, it was a welcome relief! There were smiles all-round, because most adults realise that usually when babies are hungry, all they need is to be fed.

Babies come with a variety of behavioural patterns, and mothers have a variety of breastfeeding experiences. I was fortunate to have been a very experienced mother and breastfeeder by the time I had my fifth baby and was working as an elected member in the ACT Legislative Assembly. However, many parliamentarians who have babies were elected before beginning to have their children. As a result, they are experiencing the ups and downs of managing the baby's behavioural patterns and learning breastfeeding skills for the very first time. Some children are born with a tendency to be noisier than others. This can be because of nature, or because they are experiencing discomfort (e.g. colic). Some babies are born better-able to be fed, and some mums just have a better milk supply than others. Sometimes, breastfeeding is easy and comfortable, and sometimes it is very difficult and requires grit and determination.

Basically, before a baby is born, no one can predict how well it will feed. As a mum develops confidence and the skills of breastfeeding, which are not as simple as one might think, she will know how to best manage her child, along with the responsibilities of the Parliament.

My proposal is that women should be able to either vote from their office as a proxy, or take their baby to the chamber to vote as they see fit. When in the chamber, there should not be a definitive requirement that the baby be on the breast for the whole period that she is in the chamber.

It should be entirely up to the mother to decide if the baby should be fed in the office, or in the chamber. There should not be onerous restrictions put on her managing her baby. I think that in 2015, most women would be surprised to find that there were such specific rules set about whether a tiny baby can sit with his or her mother for a few minutes in the chamber while a vote is taking place. Mothers in Parliament will, of course, want to get this balance right, and it should not be up to anyone who knows her baby less than her to determine how to best manage the situation.

Parliamentarians should be in a position where they can confidently have a family as well as a career, otherwise, we will miss out on some great citizens for the next generation and some great women for our parliaments.

I am very happy to appear before the committee or meet with someone from the committee to answer any questions and help in anyway. I also intend to write to all other parliamentary chambers around the country and suggest that they pre-emptively address the state of their rules in this regard, as you

are. It is not a matter of conservative or progressive politics, but of women being able to have a job and a family.

Again I thank you for having the strength to create a situation where fewer women feel dreadfully torn between the needs of their babies' and their parliamentary responsibilities. I trust you will come up with a set of guidelines that rightfully puts the mother in the decision making position.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Giulia Jones', with a stylized, cursive script.

Giulia Jones MLA
Member for Molonglo
9 November 2015

