

H.691

Introduced by Representative Bartley of Fairfax

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Health; hospitals; health insurance; maternity care; newborns;
breastfeeding

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to require health insurance plans to provide coverage for breastfeeding equipment and support, including lactation counseling. It would also require hospitals to adopt infant-feeding policies that promote breastfeeding.

An act relating to breastfeeding education and support

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. FINDINGS

The General Assembly finds that:

(1) Breastfeeding helps protect infants against a range of infections, diseases, and serious outcomes, including sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

(2) Breast milk adapts to an infant's needs, is easily digested, and contains immunologic and anti-inflammatory components.

1 (3) Breastfeeding supports cognitive development and reduces the risk
2 of childhood obesity, type 2 diabetes, and other chronic diseases.

3 (4) Breastfeeding helps a mother's postpartum recovery and promotes
4 bonding and attachment between mother and infant.

5 (5) Breastfeeding reduces health care costs by lowering the incidence of
6 both infant and maternal illnesses.

7 (6) Breastfeeding is more cost-effective for families than purchasing
8 infant formula and related supplies.

9 (7) Breast milk is a natural, renewable food source for infants that uses
10 fewer resources to produce than infant formula; does not require
11 manufacturing, packaging, transport, distribution, or additional waste disposal;
12 and therefore has a substantially smaller environmental footprint than formula
13 feeding.

14 (8) While breastfeeding is not an option for every mother or family, its
15 benefits are significant, and its use should be facilitated and encouraged
16 whenever possible.

17 Sec. 2. 8 V.S.A. § 4085 is added to read:

18 § 4085. COVERAGE FOR BREASTFEEDING EQUIPMENT AND
19 SUPPORT

20 (a) A health insurance plan shall provide coverage for breastfeeding
21 education, support, counseling, and equipment for the duration of

1 breastfeeding. The coverage shall include comprehensive prenatal and
2 postnatal lactation support and counseling.

3 (b) Coverage under this section shall be provided without any deductible,
4 coinsurance, co-payment, or other cost-sharing requirement, except to the
5 extent that such coverage would disqualify a high-deductible health plan from
6 eligibility for a health savings account pursuant to 26 U.S.C. § 223.

7 Sec. 3. 18 V.S.A. § 1911c is added to read:

8 § 1911c. INFANT-FEEDING POLICY

9 (a) As used in this section:

10 (1) “Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative” means the program sponsored by
11 the World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund
12 (UNICEF) that recognizes hospitals that offer an optimal level of care for
13 infant feeding.

14 (2) “Perinatal unit” means a maternity and newborn service of the
15 hospital for the provision of care during pregnancy, labor, delivery, and
16 postpartum and neonatal periods with appropriate staff, space, equipment, and
17 supplies.

18 (b) Each general hospital that has a perinatal unit shall have an infant-
19 feeding policy. The infant-feeding policy shall promote breastfeeding,
20 utilizing guidance provided by the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative and the
21 Department of Health. The infant-feeding policy may include guidance on

1 formula supplementation or bottle-feeding, if preferred by the mother or when
2 exclusive breastfeeding is contraindicated for the mother or infant.

3 (c) The infant-feeding policy shall be routinely communicated to perinatal
4 unit staff, beginning with hospital orientation, and shall be clearly posted in the
5 perinatal unit or on the hospital's website, or both.

6 (d) The infant-feeding policy shall apply to all infants in a perinatal unit.

7 (e) The Department of Health shall develop guidance that is consistent with
8 the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative to support hospitals in establishing and
9 maintaining infant-feeding policies in accordance with this section.

10 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

11 This act shall take effect on January 1, 2027.