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Library of Congress Opens a Lactation Center

by Nan Thompson Ernst, Chief Steward AFSCME Local 2910

On March 9, 2012, about 40 employees cheered as the Library of Congress opened the first of two planned lactation centers for nursing mothers. The center, located in the northwest (green) corridor on the third floor of the Madison Building (LM 312), is a former staff lounge newly renovated by the Architect of the Capitol and designed by the Library's Facility Services. The opening was a joyous occasion for the Library employees who worked to create this facility and everyone was delighted with the facility, especially the working mothers ready to sign up.

The Madison Lactation Center provides a private, secure, and sanitary environment for nursing mothers and has four individually-locking pumping rooms. Each of those rooms contains a table, chair, and electrical outlet. The common area of the center includes two deep sinks with hot and cold water and a seating and information area. The center is not equipped with a refrigerator, breast pump, or storage. Photographs which feature mothers and babies adorn the walls, making the center beautiful as it is functional. The reproductions were made from the Library's collections and funds for framing the artwork were provided by the Library's unions.

Lucy Suddreth, director of Support Operations at the Library, was a chief proponent of the lactation center. At the opening she described the center as a calming place where working mothers can express breast milk to realize the health benefits of nursing and continue to provide the optimum nutrition for their babies when they are back on the job. Ms. Suddreth praised the work of the joint labor-management committee which has been meeting since October 2011 to identify best practices and make recommendations for furnishings, policies, and procedures for the Library's lactation facilities. The committee includes Dr. Sandra Charles of Health Services, Michelle Watson and Samantha Jones (OSO), and union representatives Nan Ernst and Adrienne Lundgren (AFSCME 2910 Guild), Melissa Evans (AFSCME 2477 Union), and Wendy Ginsberg (CREA), who initially advocated for a lactation facility.

In opening the Madison Lactation Center, the Library joins other Legislative Branch agencies in providing space at work for nursing mothers to express milk. The US Congress's Office of the Attending Physician oversees lactation rooms in the Ford, Cannon, and Russell office buildings, and two rooms in the Capitol. A room is available to the US Capitol Police in the Postal Building across from Union Station. The Government Accountability Office also has a lactation program.

Construction of a second lactation facility in the Adams Building is in the planning stages. Examination rooms in Health Services (LM G40) will continue to be available to nursing mothers. Employees in other Library buildings may use health rooms, available offices or conference rooms, or other areas designated for lactation. Resources available to employees in all Library buildings is currently being compiled and will soon be posted on the Health Services web page on the staff intranet.

If you are a nursing mother and would like access to lactation facilities, please contact Sharon Harris in the Health Services Office at in LM G-40, 202-707-8035. Health Services will provide

guidance on available facilities and resources, enroll you in an appropriate facility, and authorize your application for a key. Once you have a key to the Madison Lactation Center, it is available to you at any time.