



Joe Valley

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Justin Merkey
City of Gladstone
Gladstone Community Center
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Dear Justin,

Yesterday at 2:16 PM I received a message from my wife, Andrea, stating that she was asked to move to the changing room at the Gladstone Community Pool to breastfeed our son. I promptly drove to the community center to determine the situation. I spoke with Adam who I found most helpful and respectful when I asked to see documentation of your policy on prohibiting breastfeeding at the facility. Adam explained that he did not have a policy to share with me in writing. However, the sense that I got from Adam was that you have stated the policy at the pool is to curtail women from breastfeeding at the pool.

Adam stated that the policy of asking women to stop breastfeeding at the pool is because the community center does not want other people to feel uncomfortable at the sight of a breastfeeding mother.

I also had the opportunity to speak with Justin Merkey, who reported that he was sorry if he caused Andrea to feel uncomfortable after asking her to leave the pool area. Justin explained that he does not have a written document outlining the Gladstone Community Center policy on curtailing breastfeeding. Similarly to Adam, Justin reported that the pool does not want anyone to feel offended with the sight of a breastfeeding mother.

This situation seems pretty cut and dried to me. The Missouri General Assembly's revised statutes in Chapter 191 on Health and Welfare, Section 191.918 states, "Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, a mother may, with as much discretion as possible, breast-feed her child in any public or private location where the mother is otherwise authorized to be." It's likely that Adam and Justin couldn't find a written policy on curtailing breastfeeding mothers because such a document would be grounds for a lawsuit in the State of Missouri.

The logical reasoning behind both Adam and Justin's explanation for why Andrea was asked to leave the pool was this: other people may become offended at the sight of a breastfeeding

mother. Here's the thing; breastfeeding is a normal and natural family choice, and the law protects it as such. Asking a breastfeeding mother to move or cover up is against the law.

Here is what I am looking for; I would like to see in writing your policy on breastfeeding. If you do not yet have one, then I request that you write to us what we may come to expect the next time we would visit the Gladstone Community Center. If you determine that your policy is to not ask breastfeeding women to cover up/remove themselves, then I ask you to write a letter addressing how what my wife experienced yesterday was the opposite of your policy.

The timing of this incident couldn't be anymore perfect. Yesterday, a story broke the news about a breastfeeding mother being escorted from Anthropologie in Beverly Hills. Find the CBS News story by searching Google for "Anthropologie Breastfeeding." A store manager from Anthropologie called the mother to apologize and even the PR department released an official comment: *We are disappointed to hear of the unfortunate experience that occurred in our Beverly Hills store. As a company comprised of hundreds of mothers, which seeks to put the customer first, we celebrate women in all of their life stages. Given our staff's dedication to providing exceptional customer service, we welcome this as an opportunity to enhance our customer experience by providing further training and education for our staff. Our aim is that all women—all mothers—be comfortable in our stores.*

The breastfeeding mother posted her experience on her facebook page, and she was met with overwhelming support that resulted in a large group of breastfeeding mothers staging a "nurse-in" yesterday and arriving with babies in arms at the store's Beverly Hills location.

My wife Andrea posted about her experience on facebook yesterday, which yielded comments from angry mothers who see the experience Andrea had at the pool yesterday as an opportunity to stand up for their own right to breastfeed.

What we would like to see, and what would help other breastfeeding mothers in the Kansas City area feel confident at your center, is a formal statement from you explaining that the Gladstone Community Center is now a breastfeeding friendly place. It would also help for you to put up a pro-breastfeeding sticker in your window. Once we see that you have made an effort to comply with the law and also to be more pro-breastfeeding, we would be happy to share this on Facebook.

Gladstone Community Center is a place for families; show us that you support families by supporting breastfeeding.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joe Valley".

Joe Valley