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The Chief Minister

(Submitted through _____)

World Breastfeeding Week 2015, from 1-7 August 2015

“Breastfeeding and Work- Let’s make it work!”

Petition to ensure appropriate Maternity Protection Benefits for all Working Women

Breastfeeding is one of the important determinants of child health, development, nutrition and survival. It is a well-established and recommended intervention for the improvement of child nutrition. Studies have shown that breastfeeding within the first hour of birth decreases neonatal deaths by 22%. Similarly, exclusive breastfeeding for first six months of life prevents morbidity and mortality due to common childhood illness like diarrhoea and pneumonia.

The number of women employees is growing in both formal and informal sectors and hence the maternity leave and other maternity benefits have become highly essential to provide a support system that would allow combining breastfeeding and work. In this context, maternity protection policy is essential for all working women. The policy should entitle all women to work with dignity, and to benefit from respectable work conditions that bar out discrimination and discriminatory practices based on their sex and their reproductive role.

The constitution of India, under article 42, states, “The State shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.” In the light of the constitutional mandate, India has two legislations for working women in the organised sector. First, the Maternity Benefit Act 1961, it provides maternity leave for twelve weeks; and two breastfeeding breaks of the prescribed duration for nursing the child until the child attains the age of fifteen months. The second is Employee State Insurance Act, 1948 provides some benefits. In 2008, Central Government adopted the recommendations of the Sixth Pay Commission and gave substantial allowance of 180 days of maternity leaves on full pay and in addition paid Child Care leave for a period of 2 years as a part of maternal entitlements to its women employees. The same was also adopted by few governments.

To ensure appropriate Maternity Protection Benefits for all Working Women, We demand for:

- Uniform provision of six months paid maternity leave for all women working across all the sectors.
- Effective implementation of the provisions of the Maternity Benefits Act.
- Provisions of crèches and space for breastfeeding/ breastmilk expression at work place.
- Peer counselling in the community to support women to breastfeed.

Signature_____