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Southern Connecticut State University becomes breastfeeding-friendly campus

By Brian Zahn Published 3:18 pm, Sunday, April 8, 2018

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Michele Vancour and Chandra Kelsey with Southern Connecticut State University President Joe Bertolino.

NEW HAVEN — When Chandra Kelsey, Connecticut Breastfeeding Coalition co-chairwoman, presented a certificate to Southern Connecticut State University for its role in making the school friendly to breastfeeding parents, she said it was about multiple things: access, realism, revolution and, perhaps most importantly, empowerment.

"It's an empowerment issue; a way to say we want moms to have a life, work and go to school and do stuff, and they shouldn't have to stay at home," she said.

Kelsey, an adjunct professor, and breastfeeding coalition co-chairwoman Michele Vancour, director of faculty development and professor of public health at SCSU, said

they spent about a year working to make SCSU the first university in the nation to have a comprehensive breastfeeding policy and volunteer network.

Vancour said the idea first came to her when giving a keynote address at a college in Ontario where she saw a campus-wide breastfeeding initiative.

Connecticut state law allows breastfeeding in public and requires employers to make accommodation at the workplace, but she said the law falls short of addressing student populations.

Vancour and Kelsey drew interest from about 50 "breastfeeding champions" located in different parts of campus who received training to become resources for anyone looking to find a safe and private place to breastfeed or pump.

"Our champions not only support breastfeeding, but know where spaces are or who to refer people to," Vancour said.

Because breastfeeding is illegal in public bathrooms, Vancour said the initiative focuses on creating secure and private swing spaces in various parts of campus in addition to lactation rooms.

According to the women's health [website](#) for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "The cells, hormones, and antibodies in breast milk help protect babies from illness. This protection is unique and changes every day to meet your baby's growing needs."

Further, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention [website](#) notes that the percentage of infants "who start out breastfeeding increased" from 73 percent among babies born in 2004 to 83 percent for babies born in 2014, though disparities in support for mothers remain.

As a student, Kelsey said she was sometimes made to pump from her car in a garage.

"It's cumbersome," she said. "It's like trying to prepare a lunch in the car, finding places to set your stuff down. In a parking garage, if someone pulls up next to you, it is a little awkward."

Vancour said the initiative comes at a time when the nontraditional population at SCSU is growing, and the school is welcoming more people of childbearing age.

"This is just one spoke of that wheel of support," she said. "The coalition is hoping other colleges and universities in the state are going to follow our lead and become breastfeeding-friendly campuses as well."

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