

Advocating For Access to Donor Human Milk- HB 650 & 651

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During this spring term of my internship with Saul's Light, I have been helping with our donor human milk initiative. Saul's Light is working with Representative Hilferty to pass [HB 650](#) and [651](#), which will provide Medicaid and commercial insurance coverage (respectively) for donor human milk in Louisiana. I have been researching existing donor human milk coverage legislation in other states and learning about the importance of donor human milk. I have also been creating materials, such as a toolkit, one pager, and fact sheet, to share information about the bills and the importance of donor human milk coverage.

In these past few months, I've gotten a taste of how complex the process is to create and pass a bill. Our legislative process is long and complicated, which definitely has value but also makes things very challenging. Originally, the plan was for the bills to have already been presented before the House Insurance and Health and Welfare committees. However, this has been postponed for now due to opposition to the bill. We are working on building our coalition and making any amendments to the bills in order to get as much support as possible.

I really value the work that we're doing at Saul's Light, and these bills are incredibly important for babies and families in Louisiana. However, this legislative process has been really frustrating. As an aspiring doctor, it's upsetting to constantly see the difficulties people face in accessing healthcare, and it's hard to wrap my mind around the fact that we commercialize basic human rights. Doctors prescribe donor human milk for many preterm and low birth weight infants who are unable to participate in breastfeeding or whose mother is unable to produce enough milk. Human milk is a medical necessity for these babies, but many families cannot access it due to lack of insurance coverage. Human milk not only provides important nutrients for babies, but also many disease fighting factors that prevent against life-threatening diseases, which is especially vital for our most vulnerable babies. This is extremely important in Louisiana, where we have one of the highest preterm birth and low birth weight rates in the country. Louisiana does have Medicaid coverage for in patient donor human milk use. However, this only went into effect in August of 2020 and is not enough to provide equitable and sufficient access to donor human milk.

Although this issue and the process of passing these bills is frustrating and challenging, I'm hopeful that we will be successful and be able to continue supporting Louisiana families. Everyone involved in this initiative is working incredibly hard, and I'm constantly inspired by the work they do. Saul's Light is awaiting additional information regarding the bills, so we haven't shared our toolkit for the bills yet. But in the meantime, you can follow us @sauls_light on Instagram for updates, or email advocacy@saulslight.org for more information or to get involved.