

Bill's story started in courthouse cafeteria

BY ADRIANNA PITRELLI *Law Bulletin staff writer*



Gail Schnitzer Eisenberg

After having her second child, Gail Schnitzer Eisenberg was excited to get back to work and be a young associate arguing a case in the McHenry County Courthouse.

But after driving the two hours northwest, Eisenberg needed to pump her breast milk before arguing the case.

"I brought my pump with me and put it through the scanner and warned the male security guard that it was a pump," Eisenberg said. "Then I said, 'So where can I go pump?' and he looked at me and was like, 'Oh. There's a women's washroom right there.'"

Eisenberg went to the washroom, only to realize it was a typical bathroom — it wasn't sanitary and there was nowhere for her to plug in her pump. She then asked for an alternative accommodation and was told she could go to the cafeteria and simply face the wall.

"This is a professional setting," Eisenberg said. "I didn't really want to run into opposing counsel or a judge while I'm pumping. There should be somewhere private and clean where you can pump."

Ultimately, Eisenberg decided not to pump in public, and despite being uncomfortable and upset, she advocated for her clients then drove 45 minutes to a family member's house to pump.

Eisenberg's personal experience led her to help add lactation rooms for attorneys in the Daley Center and champion Senate Bill 3503 — a measure that requires courthouses to set aside lactation rooms for use by nursing mothers.

Prior to Eisenberg's efforts, the Daley Center had a lactation room, but it was only available to employees — not litigants or attorneys. Eisenberg worked with other women in Chicago who advocated for lactation room access for law professionals. The effort was successful and female lawyers were

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granted the access they desired.

Eisenberg then began to work with ACLU Illinois who was spearheading a change to alter the way most view accommodations for nursing mothers.

They believed a law was the way to bring about change.

Previous laws addressed the need of those employed in a courthouse who need to pump breast milk at work, but the law did not apply to nursing parents who spend long hours at the courthouse, like attorneys, jurors and witnesses.

"Much of my advocacy on the bill was sharing my story so people knew its importance and knew it went beyond the Daley Center," Eisenberg said. "I also was rallying women behind the scenes, telling them to contact every senator and every representative asking for support of this bill."

The bill passed through both chambers and received the governor's signature. Every courthouse in the state must have a private lactation room by June 1.

Aside from being an advocate for access to lactation rooms, Eisenberg is an associate at Stowell & Friedman Ltd. and a New Trier Township trustee.

Asked why she puts so much time and energy into the cause, she said, "It's important to find something you're passionate about regarding your pro bono service," Eisenberg said. "It helps avoid burnout in the profession while helping make a difference. You're ensuring that passions that got you into the profession remains ignited." apitrelli@lawbulletinmedia.com