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Metro Will Train Operators on State's Breastfeeding Law

- Bulletin calls for 'all courtesies' to nursing mothers

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Aug. 31, 2004) Metro will add information about California's breastfeeding law to its operator training curriculum in response to concerns from nursing mothers who staged a small demonstration, Tuesday, in front of the Gateway building.

The agency also is issuing a bulletin to Metro operators and supervisors instructing them to "offer all courtesies and...facilitate any mothers who wish to breastfeed while using the Metro system."

Members of Maternal and Child Health Access protested two alleged incidents – one in December 2003 and the other Aug. 17, 2004 – in which Metro Bus operators on Line 55 were reported to have confronted the same passenger who was breastfeeding her baby.

With two complaints now on record, Metro will add information about the breastfeeding law to its operator training curriculum, according to Carolyn Flowers, executive officer, Operations Administration.

Violates Metro policy

The bulletin being issued to operators and supervisors also notes that, "Any physical action or verbal exchange by the Operator that is intended to restrict the rights of the mother to breastfeed shall be conceded a violation of Metro's policy and Standard Operating Procedure."

The California Civil Code, Section 43.3, explicitly allows breastfeeding in public places. The law was authored by former Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa, currently a Los Angeles City Councilman and an MTA Board member.

In a statement to media, Flowers said the agency has no policy prohibiting mothers from nursing their infants aboard Metro Buses or Metro Rail trains and is aware of the law giving women the right to breastfeed in public.

She said complaints from patrons about confrontations with nursing mothers are extremely rare. "However, we are sensitive to any single complaint and find any such incident to be unfortunate."

Governor Schwarzenegger declared August to be "Breastfeeding Awareness Month." Some 120 countries marked Aug. 1-7 as "World Breastfeeding Week."

