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# New Addition to Miami-Dade Courthouse: A Lactation Lounge

Celia Ampel, Daily Business Review

August 2, 2016

When Miami commercial litigator Deborah Baker-Egozi was a new mom, she sometimes had to take breaks during all-day court hearings to pump breast milk in a bathroom.

"There was nowhere to go," said Baker-Egozi, now with Greenspoon Marder. "Most of the judges were lovely. They would say 'Yes, you can use a jury room. I'm sorry there's no sink in there. There's no lock.' ... But that's uncomfortable when you have to do that in front of opposing counsel and your client."

That's why Baker-Egozi pushed the Miami-Dade County Courthouse to designate a lactation room, an idea that had been discussed previously but never went anywhere.

This summer, the clerk of courts, county building personnel, judges and members of the Florida Association for Women Lawyers made the room a reality in just eight weeks.

The lounge, on the third floor of the 73 W. Flagler St. civil courthouse, locks with a code, includes comfortable chairs, several electrical outlets and walls painted a relaxing lavender and adorned with art made by lawyers' children. Any nursing mother in the building on court business can use it.

Many courthouses offer private rooms for nursing mothers, including those in Charlotte, North Carolina; Chicago; Denver; Minneapolis and Portland, Oregon. In Madison, Wisconsin, county supervisors unanimously voted to designate lactation rooms in every county-owned building.

But courthouses in some cities just can't find the space. Los Angeles Superior Court allows breastfeeding mothers to defer jury duty, recognizing that while the court "makes every reasonable effort to provide a private, locked room for lactating mothers to express milk, such accommodations are not available at many courthouses."

Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Scott Bernstein first introduced the idea for a lactation room in the county courthouse years ago after hearing from a lawyer who pumped milk in her car. He spearheaded the latest initiative with Civil Division Administrative Judge Jennifer Bailey. Chief Judge Bertila Soto was on board right away.

Bailey asked the clerk's office to clear out a "really dirty and beat-up" storage room full of 450

boxes of original notes from the mortgage foreclosure crisis.

The county's internal services department swooped in with an offer of lavender paint—"usually the choices are white, white or white," Bailey joked—and the Miami-Dade chapter of FAWL paid to furnish the room. Now, similar work is underway at the criminal, children's and family courthouses, Bernstein said.

While the room is also open to jurors, witnesses, litigants and court employees, the spirit behind the space is to make it easier for female lawyers to balance family and work.

"It's hard enough to be a working parent, a trial lawyer, male or female," Bailey said. "We want to make it as easy as possible for our women lawyers to practice in this building."

Miami-Dade FAWL President Rebecca Ocariz said the organization has been talking about lactation rooms for years.

"It allows women to step right back into their career and the courtroom after having a child," said the Shook, Hardy & Bacon litigator in Miami.

Roig Lawyers attorney Julie Harris Nelson remembers that when she was nursing during her time at the state attorney's office, she used to leave the Richard E. Gerstein Justice Building and go to her office across the street to pump.

"It was very, very important to me to have a comfortable surrounding," the Miami lawyer and statewide FAWL treasurer said. "It literally took concentration. I had to be relaxed. So by creating a comfortable place for women to go ahead and pump, I think it's an excellent way to promote work-life balance and productivity. You shouldn't have to hike to your car."

Lara Bach, a Miami litigator with Weil and a nursing mother, said she is grateful the Miami civil courthouse found a place for a lactation room so she can avoid the anxiety of wondering, "Where am I going to pump today?"

Bach helped decorate the room as part of her work with Miami-Dade FAWL.

"The lactation room is a phenomenal accomplishment in the right direction," she said. "It represents a small piece of the larger gender equality puzzle, which will require a concerted and lasting effort to solve."

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*Contact Celia Ampel at [campel@alm.com](mailto:campel@alm.com). On Twitter: [@CeliaAmpel](https://twitter.com/CeliaAmpel)*

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