

Policy At A Glance:

Bottles and Breastfeeding Equipment Screening (BABES) Enhancement Act (S. 260)

This brief provides an overview of the challenges faced by those traveling via air with human milk or formula prior to the BABES Enhancement Act and highlights the provisions of the Act that address these challenges.

Introduction

Traveling with an infant can be a challenge. In addition to carrying the infant, the parent or guardian has to also carry the diaper bag, food for the infant in the form of formula or pumped human milk, equipment needed for feeding the infant, additional items needed for the infant, car seat, and stroller among other things.

When traveling via air, there is the added challenge of passing through the security checkpoint with these items. Rules regarding liquid transport by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and inappropriate handling of the human milk or infant formula during the screening process can greatly hinder, stress and frustrate parents traveling by air.¹ It can also endanger infant safety if contamination occurs during the screening process.

As such, the Bottles and Breastfeeding Equipment Screening (BABES) Enhancement Act (S. 260) was enacted with strong bipartisan support on November 25, 2025, to address these challenges.² This brief provides an overview of the challenges faced by those traveling with an infant prior to the BABES Enhancement Act and highlights the provisions of the Act that address these challenges.

Relevant Dates For S.260²

1/27/2025	Introduced in the United States Senate
5/14/2025	Passed in the Senate without amendment by unanimous consent
5/15/2025	Received in the House of Representatives
11/17/2025	Passed in the House
11/25/2025	Signed by the President and became Public Law No: 119-41

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Challenges Prior to the BABES Enhancement Act

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “air travel should not be a barrier to breastfeeding or expressing breast milk.”³ In practice, however, air travel has posed several barriers and challenges for parents traveling with breastfeeding equipment or expressed human milk. Although expressed milk and related infant and child feeding items are exempt from Transportation Security Administration (TSA) regulations that limit quantities of other liquids and gels,^{3,4} this policy has been often inconsistently applied or overlooked by TSA agents unfamiliar with the policy.⁵

The Bottles and Breastfeeding Equipment Screening (BABES) Act passed in 2016 was supposed to ensure that breast milk, formula and the items needed to transport them safely (e.g., ice packs, gel packs, etc.) could pass through TSA checkpoints without incident.⁶ However, parents such as Emily Calandrelli, the host of Netflix’s *Emily’s Wonder Lab* and YouTube’s *Emily’s Science Lab*, were forced to leave their gel packs behind due to TSA agents not fully understanding the policy.⁵ Emily was told that it would not have been a problem if she had her baby with her. However, according to existing law, travelers can carry these items regardless of whether the breastfeeding child is also traveling since moms may be traveling without the infant but need to express and store the milk.^{4,5}

In addition to getting ice packs, gel packs or pumped human milk confiscated during the TSA screening process, some parents have faced unhygienic handling of the milk or humiliating treatments. For example, TSA officers would dip the test strips directly into the pumped milk, contaminating it and make it unusable.⁵ Some parents report getting pushback when they asked the TSA agents to put on clean gloves, and another was told to sip her own milk to prove it was not dangerous.⁵

Benefits of Breastfeeding and Human Milk

Human milk provides the best nutrition for infants, and it can be given through direct breastfeeding or through bottles containing pumped human milk in cases where direct breastfeeding is not possible.¹ In addition to aiding proper growth and development, breast feeding and human milk confer health benefits for both the infant and the mother. For example, breastfed babies have a lower risk of ear infections, asthma, obesity, type 1 diabetes, and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).^{1,2} Mom’s antibodies shared through the milk protects the infant, providing passive immunity and protecting the infant from various infectious diseases to which mom has already established immunity. For mothers, breastfeeding can reduce the risk of breast and ovarian cancer, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure.²



Provisions of the BABES Enhancement Act

Background Information

Inspired by Emily Calandrelli's experience that became widely publicized, the BABES Enhancement Act (s. 260) was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) along with Senators Ted Cruz (R-TX), Steve Daines (R-MT), and Mazie Hirono (D-HI) on January 27, 2025.^{2,9} It was referred to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and passed out of the Committee without any amendments.² On May 14, 2025, it passed the Senate with unanimous vote, signaling high bipartisan support.

After it was received in the House of Representatives, it was held at the desk until November, when a motion to suspend the rules and pass the bill (a parliamentary procedure in the U.S. House of Representatives that allows for expedited consideration of legislation with broad, bipartisan support) resulted in its passage on November 17, 2025. Eight days later, the President signed it, making it law.

Details of the Provisions

The BABES Enhancement Act amends the 2016 BABES Act to require hygienic handling of expressed human milk and baby formula by the security screening personnel of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and personnel of private security companies providing security screening.¹⁰ To that end, S. 260 requires TSA to develop clear, updated

guidelines "to minimize the risk for contamination of any breast milk, baby formula, purified deionized water for infants, and juice (as well as ice packs, freezer packs, frozen gel packs and other accessories required to cool breast milk, baby formula, and juice) that is subject to re-screening or otherwise subject to additional screening."¹⁰ This guideline is to be issued no later than 90 days after the enactment of the law and every 5 years thereafter as appropriate to reflect any changes in needs and technology.^{1,10} S. 260 specifies that the guidelines are to be developed in consultation with nationally recognized maternal health organizations.¹⁰ The BABES Enhancement Act also directs TSA to ensure that its officers receive enhanced and consistent training on these procedures to prevent inconsistencies and unfortunate incidences.¹ Finally, S. 260 requires the Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security to submit to the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate a report on the audit of compliance to these requirements.

The provisions of the BABES Enhancement Act aim to improve the experience of those traveling via air with expressed human milk, associated equipment/tools and infant formula. Improving communication with parents so that they are cognizant of their rights at security checkpoints is also an important next step.

Conclusion

For breastfeeding mothers and other parents who travel via air carrying necessary nutrition for their infants, the Bottles and Breastfeeding Equipment Screening (BABES) Enhancement Act (S. 260) is a big win. By showing bipartisan support for this Act and passing it unanimously, federal lawmakers acknowledged the challenges faced by these parents and recognized the importance of ensuring hygienic and appropriate handling of human milk, baby formula and other related items at TSA security checkpoints. To ensure that S. 260 makes positive impact in practice, however, all TSA agents will need to be properly trained regarding the updated guidelines and policies and parents will need to be educated about their rights so that the challenges experienced by parents in the past are prevented.

References

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Did you know?

Approximately 900 million TSA screenings occur each year.¹¹



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