

Testimony of
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Hartford Federation of Paraprofessionals,
AFT Local 2221

**SB 150 - An Act Concerning the FMLA Family Medical Leave
Benefits for Certain Municipal Employees**

The Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 1, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Mrs. Gwenath Douglas. I am a Para-Educator for Special Education in Hartford and a building union representative. I sit on several committees within the Hartford Federation of Paraprofessionals and AFT Connecticut. I would like to speak briefly today about SB 150 An Act Concerning Family and Medical Leave Benefits for Certain Municipal Employees.

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides select employees with up to twelve (12) weeks of unpaid, employment protected leave per year. It also provides assistance in the fact that their medical benefits continue during this said leave. The FMLA is designed to help employees balance both family and work responsibly. Balance is an important attribute to have in any one person's life and in the workplace, especially where people like us work in education, working directly with meeting the needs of our children, the city of Hartford and the state of Connecticut as a whole.

I support SB 150 because there was a time in my life not too long ago that I suffered greatly without this bill being in place. The fine and outstanding man, to whom I had been married for 14 years, became very ill and suffered a very painful and terminal illness. This was not a short-term one, but very long. I went from wife/lover to care giver, advocate, legal representative, nurses aid, social worker and on top of everything else, provider. My work from the school matched my home. There was never an outlet. You go from high energy to a stress level that causes one to develop different sickness due to depression.

Unable to be with Paul hurt my heart every day. It pulled hard on me not knowing if this would be the last time I see him again. There were times when I had to pick and choose when I could be out of work fearing that I may lose my job. Had I had this benefit in place it would have lessened some of the stress I encountered at that time by being affected by what I had to face every day of our lives together until sadly Paul passed away. I had to go home after putting our students on the bus to face watching my loving husband deteriorate and waste away before my eyes and die and not being able to do anything about it even when I gave my best. He was God's gift to me and I'm glad I stayed. Having the SB 150 bill pass will not only mean so much to me, but to all of us who so greatly deserve it.

I work with students who require so much special and delicate help and services. You go from meeting the needs of your students to going back home to meet the needs of your terminal loved one. This was not an easy task. We are not baby sitters but educators. I testify not just for one, but for all those who have to be a care giver for their loved ones who are suffering today and would benefit from this bill. Allow them to hold their hand one last time and not feel guilty because they were not there until God says otherwise.