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Testimony of
Michelle Noehren
Events & Special Projects Director
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Children's Committee
February 21, 2013

Re: S.B. 887, AAC the Care 4 Kids Program
H.B. 6332, AAC Toxic Fire Retardants in Children's Products

Senators Bartolomeo and Linares, Representatives Urban and Betts, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) on S.B. 887 and H.B. 6332. PCSW does not come before this committee very frequently because our purview is women over the age of 18 but the two bills we are here in support of today have a great impact on mothers.

S.B. 887, AAC the Care 4 Kids Program

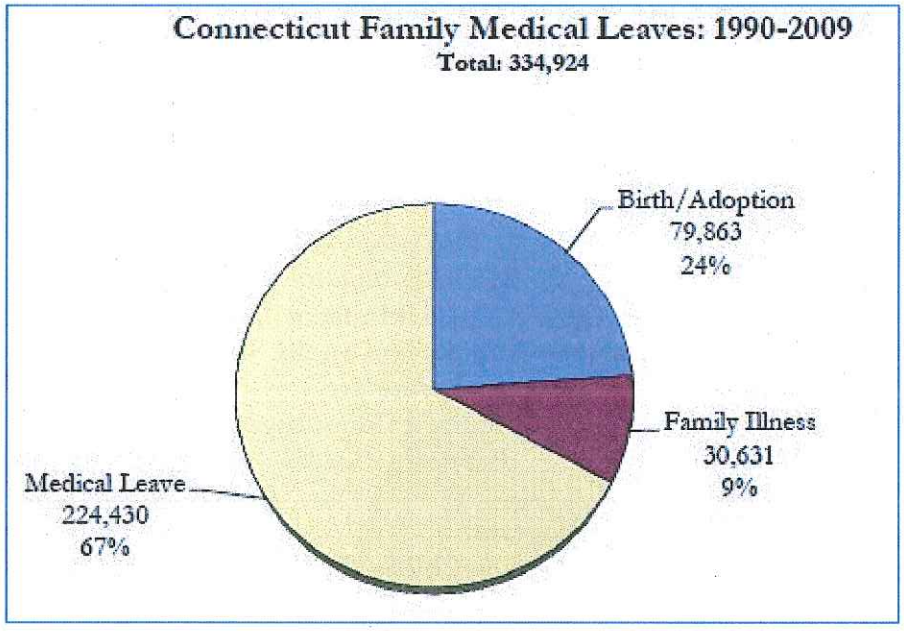
S.B. 887 would make changes to the Care 4 Kids subsidy program to extend eligibility to recipients who take unpaid leave from their employment due to the birth or impending birth of a child provided certain criteria are met. Policies to support workers as they provide care for family members or take care of their own health are essential for a strong Connecticut workforce.

Work supports such as childcare are critical to helping low-income mothers gain and maintain employment. A study conducted by the Center for Economic and Policy Research examined how patterns of childcare access affect women's employment outcomes. The author points out that, in order to receive publicly funded childcare, many women need to either be on welfare or have just exited welfare. Many working families cannot afford to purchase childcare, and only those who very recently left welfare have any likelihood of receiving public benefits. This creates a hole in the safety net for low-wage working women who do not have sufficient income to purchase childcare in the market.[1]

[1] Heather Boushey, Ph.D. *The Effects on Employment and Wages When Medicaid and Child Care Subsidies are No Longer Available.* Center for Economic and Policy Research, January 26, 2005. < http://www.cepr.net/publications/Effects_on_employment_wages_without_medicaid_child_care_subsidies.htm>.

Impact on CT Women

Twenty-four percent (24%) of those that take family and medical leave do so for the birth or adoption of a child.[2]



S.B. 887 would eliminate one barrier to retaining sustainable employment, and therefore allow many low-income mothers to continue employment after the birth of a child.

H.B. 6332, AAC Toxic Fire Retardants in Children's Products

H.B 6332 would ban the use of toxic flame retardants, particularly toxic tris, in products geared towards children ages three and under. According to a report entitled *Hidden Hazards in the Nursery*, many of the products mothers use with their babies contain toxic fire retardants. The products cited include breastfeeding support pillows, car seats and diaper changing pads, among others. Toxic tris has been shown to be a carcinogen, a hormone disruptor, and to have an impact on the nervous system.

Just this week a new report was released called *Naptime Nightmares: Toxic Flame Retardants in Child Care Nap Mats* by the Center for Environmental Health. The Center found that many foam nap maps on the market contain more than one type of chemical flame retardant and multiple mats contain Tris. Naptime is meant to be a time of rest and rejuvenation for children, not a time for them to be exposed to harmful chemicals.

While there are clear reasons to ban this chemical for the health of our children, we are also here because mothers deserve the ability to purchase products for their children that are safe. Even though women are primarily the main family member purchasing products, most mothers have no idea that toxic chemicals are being used in many of the common baby products they put in their carts. Unfortunately, it's a common misconception that if a product can be bought on a shelf in a store it's safe.

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[2] Connecticut Department of Labor. *Annual Family Medical Leave Experience Reports*, 1999-2009.

We applaud the committee's attention to the use of toxic chemicals in children's products because parents want to feel confident that the products they buy and give their children will support their health & development, not harm it.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of these two bills.