

**Testimony of Susan Lloyd Yolen, Vice President, Public Policy and Advocacy
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
HB 6553 An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Family Medical Leave Insurance**

Good afternoon members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, I am Susan Yolen, Vice President for Public Policy and Advocacy at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, the state's largest provider of family planning and reproductive health care. We serve nearly 65,000 patients annually in Connecticut, at our 17 health centers across the state.

Planned Parenthood supports HB6553, which will establish a year-long task force to study how Connecticut might design an insurance program to provide short term benefits to workers unable to work due to pregnancy or the birth of a child; a non-work related illness or injury; or the need to care for a seriously ill child, spouse or parent. The need for access to paid family leave is a social justice issue that directly impacts many of the women and men of all income levels, who come through our doors seeking health care, hoping to prevent or postpone pregnancy. Or hoping to welcome a child into their family.

While Connecticut was in the vanguard of states that, in 1990, understood and passed legislation guaranteeing family and medical leave, there are many among us, nearly 25 years later, who work for small employers or who otherwise lack meaningful access to family and medical leave. Even for those who are eligible for family leave, studies show that a significant number cannot afford to take a necessary leave because they would lack pay during the leave period.

It's hard to imagine any family without a member who's been forced to deal with an unexpected serious illness requiring surgery, treatment and a period of recovery. We know that the primary use of our state's Family and Medical Leave Act is by individuals who require that benefit because of their own illnesses. And yet we're also well aware that there's a growing demand for working adults to care for their aging parents. The cost of home caregivers, assisted living facilities and skilled nursing homes is high. Thousands of Connecticut families are balancing the needs of ailing elders while also raising children who are in need of some level of daily care. Or who just need to stay home with a garden variety communicable illness.

Planned Parenthood doesn't claim to have all the answers to the dilemmas facing us, as baby boomers age, as life expectancy grows, as somewhat older mothers choose to bear children and face complicated at-risk pregnancies. But as we did back in 1990, Connecticut can be proactive to develop sound family leave insurance policies that other states may consider. A task force created by this legislation can help policy makers explore the link between paid leave and longer term family economic security. It can also help businesses understand that paid leave can contribute to a more stable, productive workforce, decrease dependence on public assistance and possibly even save employers money over time.

We urge passage of HB6553. Thank you.