



March 5, 2015

CT General Assembly, Labor and Public Employees Committee
Legislative Office Building 3800
Hartford, CT 06106

Testimony in Support of HB6932, An Act Concerning Paid Family Medical Leave

Distinguished Chairpersons and Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Ruth Canovi. I am the Manager of Public Policy for the American Lung Association (ALA) in Connecticut. The American Lung Association is a not-for-profit voluntary health organization dedicated to saving lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. I am sorry that I cannot be there in person to express both my professional and personal support of House Bill 6932, An Act Concerning Paid Family Medical Leave.

The American Lung Association in Connecticut has a public policy committee that helps determine our agenda for public priorities as an organization in Connecticut. When I brought up the issue of paid family medical leave to our committee, there was little discussion regarding the question of supporting the idea, but rather how we could move this important issue forward. The American Lung Association works to help prevent the cause of lung disease, but we also work to support those impacted by lung disease. We work on behalf of a large number of patients who are very sick as well as for their families. Chronic lung disease is a heavy burden to carry for patients and their caretakers. In Connecticut in the year 2015, sons and daughters should not have to worry about how they are going to financially keep their families afloat while they care for their dying parent. Life outside of our professional worlds happens and part of that life comes with financial obligations. However, at times of incredible challenge and stress, figuring out how we are going to pay for heat or food or other basic necessities just shouldn't be an issue. Not here. Not now. We owe it to ourselves to set up a system to help support us during these tough times. That is what we believe HB6932 does.

We all have (or will have) stories, some of us more willing to share than others, but the truth is that most, if not all of us, will be faced with major life changes – some joyful like the birth of a child and others sad like the illness and/or death of a loved one. These events often interrupt our work lives and they should. In six months spanning 2013 and 2014 I faced two very different, very challenging major life changes. In October 2013, I was fortunate to welcome my daughter to this world. I was eligible for family medical leave for 12 weeks. While I received limited pay through my employers' short term disability insurance, my partner and I were lucky enough to make the decision for me to take the full 12 weeks for which I was eligible despite the decrease in family income for the time being. That time to bond with my new baby and deal with the major life adjustment of becoming a new mom was incredibly necessary for me and my daughter. The week before I was supposed to return from maternity leave, my mother's failing health took a significant turn for the worse and she decided to opt for hospice care in her home. Having lost my father almost 4 years prior, my brothers and I were trusted with the great privilege to care for her in her final days. I was faced with the "question" – what does this mean

for my job and for my family? For me it wasn't really a question or choice and I was lucky enough that it didn't have to be. Again, my employer was completely understanding. I was able to take the time I needed to care for my dying mother and to care for myself and my family while beginning that grief process. My leave was extended and we figured things out in terms of finances. Throughout the horrible and stressful and emotional days, I knew that I was fortunate that despite my lack of income, my family would be ok and I was able to be there for my mom and my daughter. That was a real gift for the three of us. And as I cared for my mother and my new baby, I would often ask myself – what would I do if I absolutely had to work? Or at least knew that the care of my mother was going to put me and my new family at serious financial risk and hardship? I fully recognize the place of privilege from which I submit my testimony. I say now that I would not have given up those final days with my mother and those that she had with my daughter for anything. But I was able to make that choice. We shouldn't be asking anyone to do so.

Connecticut has a history of leading on employment issues. We were the first state to pass paid sick days legislation as well as to pass our own Family & Medical Leave bill. While some of our neighbors have adopted statutes to provide paid family leave, like Rhode Island and New Jersey, Connecticut still has an important opportunity to lead the country in this work. This bill would help address some serious issues around health and economic justice in our state. We recognize these are challenging economic times for the state of Connecticut, but this is a system that is long overdue and we don't anticipate a high cost to the state.

I thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. I urge you to take action and promote a more family-friendly workplace culture throughout Connecticut by passing HB6932.

Ruth Canovi
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American Lung Association in CT