



Connecticut Association for Human Services  
110 Bartholomew Avenue · Suite 4030  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106  
www.cahs.org

Casey McGuane, President  
James P. Horan, Executive Director  
860.951.2212  
860.951.6511 fax

## Testimony in support of R.B. 6932, An Act Concerning Paid Family Medical Leave

Good afternoon, Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Labor Committee. My name is Elizabeth Fraser; I am a policy analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work.

It is our concern for low income working families that brings me here today in support of R.B. 6932, An Act Concerning Paid Family Medical Leave. This bill provides a much-needed supplement to our existing Family Medical Leave Act. It permits the time to be used incrementally, allowing for recurring medical needs that occur over many months, such as chemotherapy or radiation treatments. It covers family members not presently included in FMLA law, including grandchildren and adult siblings. Most important, it implements a system that provides for paid leave.

Over the past 50 years, our workforce and family structure has changed dramatically. In two parent families, it is the norm rather than the exception that both adults must work to provide basic needs for the family. In addition, the number of single parent families has grown considerably, as have grandparents raising grandchildren. These families have an added strain on their family budget and often limited support. Sometimes families are scattered and extended family are living far away and not easily available in times of family crisis. Also more common today is when elderly parents fall ill, and adult children do not have the financial resources to provide extended care.

Our present system of FML, which was designed to allow employees the opportunity to be available in times of family need, is not working for many families. The United Way ALICE Report gives some context. ALICE families are "Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed." These are working families that are living on the brink of poverty and struggle to make ends meet each month. Thirty five percent of households in Connecticut fall into this category.<sup>1</sup> For these families, the present system of FML is just not viable. Although twelve weeks of leave must be offered to Connecticut employees, they are most often unpaid days. In fact CWEALF and the PCSW report that 78% of eligible workers don't use FML because they can't afford to lose pay.<sup>2</sup> Only those employees who are financially

<sup>1</sup> The recently released United Way ALICE Report informs us that in Connecticut, a "survival budget" for a family of four (one preschooler and one infant) is \$64,689. It would take 73% more income, or \$111,632, for these families to reach the point of "financial stability." Despite efforts to achieve financial stability, these working families are often only one small crisis away from financial disaster.

<sup>2</sup> [www.paidfamilyleavect.org](http://www.paidfamilyleavect.org)

secure with substantial savings are truly able to use this time without putting their family at financial risk.

This bill seeks to remedy this disconnect. It provides for **paid family leave** and does so with little financial impact on the employer. Employees would pay a percentage of income into a specified fund. When a family emergency occurs, when a new baby is born or when a child becomes gravely ill, employees would be able to draw from the fund, up to 100% of their weekly earnings capped, at \$1,000 per week. This important step will allow many more employees to be available in times of family crisis. It also will allow new mothers to have the time to bond with their new babies without worrying about the financial ramifications.

The bill also seeks to allow grandparents, grandchildren and adult siblings to be included in coverage, regardless of age. This provision takes into account changing family structure. Many grandparents are now primary caregivers for grandchildren, and many adult siblings have no one other than a brother or sister to help care for them in the event of serious illness. Through this bill we can acknowledge and support these families.

As society changes we need to continue to value family. None of us are immune from family events that cause stress and anguish, and we know that the more time a parent can spend with a new baby the better. The time we are able to spend with one another when we are in greatest need is a precious gift.

Connecticut has been on the forefront of paid leave issues. We have an opportunity to make family leave a viable option for many more of Connecticut's families. Please support R.B. 6932.