

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut
Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 5, 2015**

**IN SUPPORT OF
HB 6932 AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE**

Good afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental health conditions. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for improved services, more humane treatment and an end to stigma and economic and social discrimination. We represent individuals who live with mental health conditions and parents and family members of individuals living with mental health conditions. I am writing to you today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to support raised bill *HB 6932 An Act Concerning Paid Family Medical Leave*.

Thank you to the committee for raising this important bill concerning paid family medical leave. Currently many families are left to struggle when a household earner becomes seriously ill, has a baby or needs to take care of a family member, which can happen to all of us and does happen to many of us. As a state, and nation, that supports family values, we can and should be doing more for working people. We can truly support family values at work by creating a state-wide system of paid family leave.

- **Connecticut has historically been a leader on paid leave issues.** We were the first state in the nation to pass our own family and medical leave bill and were the first to pass paid sick days legislation. We now have a tremendous opportunity to be a leader on paid family and medical leave and set an example for the rest of the nation.
- **Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is not working for most people.** While the passage of the FMLA was groundbreaking in the early 90's, it is not working for most employees. 78% of those eligible for FMLA don't take it because it is unpaid and many employees aren't even eligible for this unpaid leave because their employer doesn't meet the number threshold of employees.
- **Paid family and medical leave would yield enormous benefits for all employees.** When employees have access to paid family and medical leave and know that they can take time off when they need it most, they are happier and more productive in the workplace.
- **There would be little cost to employers.** The system that is being suggested would be fully funded by employees with no employer contribution. According to The Institute for Women's Policy Research, the cost to Connecticut employees would be very low at just a quarter of one percent of someone's income. Lower wage employees would pay less because contributions are calculated by a percentage. This is a very small investment that would provide workers with a huge benefit.

We would request a change in the current definition of "son or daughter" as it leaves out many people who need care. Currently, CT FMLA applies only to children who are under 18 years of age, unless they have a mental or physical disability that makes them "incapable" of self-care. This leaves out a large number of adults with health conditions and disabilities who live on their own or with some assistance, who would likely rely on their parents or a sibling if their health condition temporarily became more serious requiring extra help from a family member. Also, adults, especially young adults, without a spouse or child, would most often rely on their parents in this situation.

This investment in workers' wellbeing and productivity is especially crucial for families who experience challenges with mental health conditions. An employee who is dealing with a mental health condition may need more time off during an especially difficult period than paid sick days afford him/her, while remaining willing and ready to return to work once he/she is able to take care of this health situation. An employee who has a family member who is dealing with a difficult time with a mental health condition might need some extra time as well. This family member could be a parent or sibling of any age.

As the above makes clear, passing this bill would be a win-win for hardworking residents of Connecticut and their families, and the state's economy.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please let me know if I can answer any questions for you.

Respectfully submitted,

Daniela Giordano, MSW
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NAMI Connecticut