KEVIN LEMBO
STATE COMPTROLLER

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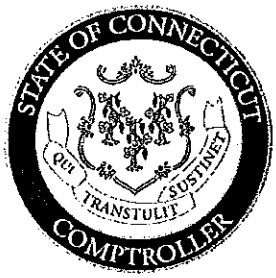

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE *of the* STATE COMPTROLLER
55 Elm Street
Hartford, CT 06106

WRITTEN TESTIMONY
Kevin Lembo
State Comptroller

Concerning
H.B. 6932 An Act Concerning Paid Family Medical Leave
H.B. 6874 An Act Concerning Graduate Assistant Benefits

March 5, 2015

Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak, Senator Hwang, Representative Rutigliano and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for raising these pieces of legislation and providing the opportunity to express my support.

H.B. 6932 An Act Concerning Paid Family Medical Leave

As a member of the Family Medical Leave Insurance Task Force, I am an advocate for the creation of an insurance product to cover paid family medical leave. A mechanism to offer replacement income for their time away from work, and consistent with the federal Family Medical Leave Act, will make FMLA a more meaningful benefit and bolster family financial security.

The United States of America and Papua New Guinea are the only countries that do not provide some protected form of partially paid time off for working women who have just given birth.

When studying the caregivers of children and elderly parents in the U.S., 69% are women and 13% are men; and 41% are women and 23% are men, respectively. But issues concerning paid leave do not affect only women. When men have access to paid family leave, it actually encourages them to take time off. The State of California implemented paid family leave in 2004 and saw a 400% increase in the number of men who applied for the leave as their program became more known. Additionally, according to the National Partnership for Women and Families, fathers are more likely to be involved in the direct, long-term care of their children when they take leave after their child's birth.

(more)

When looking specifically at Connecticut, 48% of caregivers who are employed do not have access to paid family and medical leave, while the number of family caregivers who provide support for parents and aging relatives continues to grow, especially as the baby boomer generation ages.

According to AARP, studies show that throughout the year, there are 711,000 family caregivers in Connecticut providing 465 million hours of care, which total a value of $5.8 billion. If family caregivers are no longer available, the economic cost to the U.S. health care and long-term services and support systems would increase significantly.

The benefits to employees are clear, but employers may benefit from paid family medical leave as well. In a comprehensive study of California's Family Leave Insurance program, a majority of employers showed either a cost savings or no additional costs related to implementation. According to a consultant for the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, New Jersey businesses have experienced little difficulty adjusting to the requirements of the state's laws. And not only have their bottom lines been positively affected, but so has the attitude of their employees. Employers in both states credit the state paid family medical leave laws with increased morale and loyalty among their employees.

I hope you will support this legislation.

H.B. 6874 An Act Concerning Graduate Assistant Benefits

I support the substitute language that will be submitted for this bill, which will enable graduate assistants who are employees of the University of Connecticut (UCONN) to have access to quality and more affordable health care through the Partnership Plan, which my office administers.

In legislation that was passed in 2003, the UCONN graduate assistants were removed from the state employee health plan and put into a separate health plan with benefits that have steadily eroded.

Participation in the student health plan is required of the graduate assistants, who are furthering their education and also working at the university. While the premium may be more affordable for an individual, it is significant for those with families – at least 10% of a graduate assistant's average annual salary of $18,000 - $22,000.

Bringing the graduate assistants into the Partnership Plan will provide comprehensive health care in an affordable way to the benefit of all parties. I look forward to working with UCONN on its implementation.

I urge your support.

Thank you for your consideration.