

Labor Committee of the CT General Assembly, March 5, 2015

Testimony of Lauren Ruth, M.S., M.Phil.  
Regarding HB 6932

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony in support of HB 6932. My name is Lauren Ruth, and I am a doctoral candidate in Social Psychology at Yale University. My research focuses on attitudes and stereotypes about gender and how these create and sustain inequalities. This year I have also been interning as a lobbyist for Planned Parenthood.

When I first heard about the campaign for Paid Family Medical Leave in CT, I was excited about a unique aspect of this legislature, and that is paternity leave. I'd like to share some research that will demonstrate some of the ways in which paternity leave unexpectedly benefits mothers, children, and fathers.

In 2000, the U.S. Department of Labor revealed that only 3% of men take FMLA for paternity reasons (Halverson, 2003). The most cited reason why men could not use their FMLA time was that they could not afford to take extended unpaid time off of work, especially when many families were already losing significant income due to wives taking unpaid time off for maternity leave. Creating paid Family and Medical Leave could solve this problem for many families. When looking at 24 countries that allow paternity leave, fathers' use of paternity leave is greatest when they have significant (more than 50%) income replacement combined with the ability to take more than two weeks off (O'Brien, 2009). When Iceland instituted a 4-week paternity leave policy combined with a significant income replacement, 90% of fathers opted to take paternity leave (Gislason, 2007). Countries like Iceland that have instituted paid paternity leave policies have provided "natural experiments;" data from before and after paternity leave policy instatement in these countries have yielded some surprising results.

Perhaps the least surprising result is that paternity leave benefits wives. Couples that had children after paternity leave was implemented reported 11% lower levels of conflict over the household division of labor as well as being 50% more likely to equally divide regular household tasks like washing clothes (Kotsadam & Finseraas, 2001). Iceland also reported that paternity leave has leveled the status of men and women working high-status positions, because wives are able to go back to work sooner due to their husbands being at home with the infant (Gislason, 2007). In the United States, length of paternity leave taken significantly correlates with men's likeliness to engage in bathing, feeding, and diapering behaviors 9 months after the paternity leave ends (Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007). In Norway, fathers who took longer paternity leave reported engaging in more interactions with their children from birth until age 5 (Rege & Solli, 2010). Even when accounting for men's commitment to fatherhood prior to the baby's birth, length of paternity leave seems uniquely to predict men's involvement after birth and through childhood. Finally, toddlers (particularly sons) of mothers with high paternal involvement leave show increased levels of secure attachment to their mother (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984).

More surprising is the breadth of ways that increased father involvement impacts children. For infants and toddlers, greater father involvement is associated with infants being more sociable

with strangers, having more positive affect when confronted with challenges, and paying more attention to cognitively challenging tasks (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984). In adolescents, early life father involvement predicts lower levels of aggression, antisocial behavior, delinquent behavior, depression, low-self esteem, and anxiety (Carlson, 2006). In adults, early life father involvement predicts lower levels of psychological distress (Flouri & Buchanan, 2002). Notably, early childhood father involvement serves as a buffer against the negative effects of non-traditional family structure. So even when a father does not live with his children, the more involved he is with his children early in their lives, the less likely his children are to develop psychological and behavioral problems later.

Finally, taking paternity leave shows great benefit to fathers. Fathers who take paternity leave report feeling greater senses of self-efficacy in parenting as well as heightened senses of responsibility toward the security of their children (Rehel, 2014). Men who take longer paternity leave also tend to live longer (Mansdotter & Lundin, 2010) possibly because this heightened sense of responsibility leads them to take better care of their health and engage in fewer risky behaviors. Longer paternity leave is also associated with fathers taking less sickness leave throughout their careers and having less inpatient care (Mansdotter, Lindholm, & Winkvist, 2007).

In short, when men are able to take extended paternity leave at high levels of income replacement, they are more likely to do so. Taking paternity leave seems to cause greater levels of father involvement, and father involvement is positively related to psychological, behavioral, and health benefits for wives, children, and fathers.

My e-mail address is [lauren.ruth@yale.edu](mailto:lauren.ruth@yale.edu), and I am happy to further discuss these research findings with anyone interested.

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