

**Testimony to the Labor and Public Employees Committee**  
**H.B. 6932, An Act Concerning Paid Family Medical Leave**  
**H.B. 6784, An Act Expanding Paid Sick Leave**  
**Submitted by Shannon Houston, MSW**  
**Social Worker, New Haven Resident**  
**March 5, 2015**

Dear Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Labor Committee:

I support HB 6932 and HB 6784 because they allow workers to balance caring for their families and their jobs. HB 6932 would establish a paid family and medical leave program, while HB 6784 would expand Connecticut's groundbreaking paid sick days program to workers who are not currently covered, such as those working for organizations with less than 50 employees. HB 6784 also broadens the definition of family member from child and spouse to include a sibling, parent, grandparent or grandchild, reflecting the realities of today's multi-generational families.

These policies help working families without harming businesses. In 2013, a year and a half after Connecticut's first paid sick leave law took effect, the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) surveyed over 250 Connecticut employers who were impacted by the new law, and concluded that "the law has had a modest impact on businesses in the state." The CEPR found that most employers reported "a modest impact or no impact of the law on their costs or business operations, and that the administrative burden was minimal."<sup>1</sup> At the time of the survey, over three-quarters of surveyed employers expressed support for the paid sick leave law. These survey results demonstrate that Connecticut can extend family-friendly policies to workers without harming our business community. Our groundbreaking paid sick leave law is working, but it is still leaving too many workers out.

HB 6932 is particularly important to me, as a young, newly married, working professional hoping to start a family in the near future. As a social worker, I have often worked for small nonprofits without strong family leave policies. Currently, it would be very difficult for me to have a child, as I will have no guaranteed paid leave (aside from a few saved vacation days) and just 6 weeks of unpaid leave. On the other hand, when women *are* able to find employers who have stronger family leave policies, we can then feel forced into staying at that employer for longer than we might have otherwise. Because these benefits are so tied to specific employers, they often hamper women's financial and employment decisions, impacting women's ability to make changes in their careers that might otherwise be beneficial, such as to seek higher level positions, better pay, or work closer to home, or to start their own business ventures.

Of course, there are thousands of Connecticut women who aren't as lucky as I am, who work for employers exempt from FMLA and don't even have the guarantee of unpaid leave, let alone paid. I see many of these women every day at the nonprofit organization where I work in Hartford, an adult education organization; they are terrified to miss a day of work for fear of being fired. *The beauty of a statewide, universal system of paid family leave is that leave would no longer be tied exclusively to our employers and would be available to everyone, whether they work for a large corporation, a small business, or are self-employed.* Such a system would allow more flexibility and financial security for working women juggling both careers and family planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2014. <http://www.cepr.net/documents/good-for-buisness-2014-02-21.pdf>

Connecticut's Family Medical Leave Insurance Taskforce, staffed by the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, submitted a report to your committee in November 2014 that included that task force's recommendations on how to set up this new system of paid family leave with only employee contributions. The task force shared research done by the national Institute for Women's Policy Research, which estimated that in order to provide a basic paid family leave benefit equal to two-thirds of the average weekly earnings of the employee, Connecticut workers would need to contribute, on average, just over \$134/year each (or about \$11/month).<sup>2</sup> While I would prefer to see a system to which both employers and employees contribute, if the above estimates prove correct, then the system proposed by the FMLI Taskforce sounds like a very reasonable start.

Beyond women of childbearing age, HB 6932 and HB 6784 would benefit everyone in our state: the baby boomer, like my mother, who is still working full-time but must now take on the responsibility of caring for her elderly mother; the worker who contracts the flu and must stay home to care for himself and avoid spreading illness to co-workers; the new father who needs as much time to bond with his newborn baby as his partner does; the sister, like my co-worker, whose sibling has a serious chronic illness and no one else to take him to doctor's appointments.

We *all* need paid leave at some point in our lives to care for ourselves and our families, and we all benefit when workers at every level can keep their jobs and their paychecks so that they can remain financially secure, pay taxes and contribute to our state's economy.

It is for these reasons that I ask for your support of HB 6932 and HB 6784.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Shannon Houston, MSW  
New Haven Resident  
Social Worker/Nonprofit Administrator in Hartford

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<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Family Medical Leave Insurance Taskforce Report, November 2014.  
<https://ctpcsw.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/fmli-taskforce-report-final.pdf>