

March 5, 2015

To Representative Tercyak, Senator Gomes and the members of the Labor Committee,

My name is Shari Smith and I am a server at a small restaurant in Norwich, Connecticut. My current work and my past experiences are good evidence that the family medical leave law needs to be amended to include businesses with fewer than 50 employees, and that we need an income replacement program to pair with it so that workers can afford to take the time off that they need.

Several years ago my husband suffered a stroke as a result of scarring from a brain tumor he had as a child. He was an HVAC technician at the time and we had a 9 year old son.

My husband's stroke was severe. He is essentially paralyzed on the left side of his body now. The effects of the stroke could have been mitigated by intensive physical therapy but, at the time, there was no transportation for him to a local treatment center; I would have had to drive him.

Because I had no paid leave, I could not afford to miss work. I could not afford to take care of my husband. Before work I would drive him to a neighbor or friend's home, often in a neighboring town, and leave him there for my shift. I was told only the Norwich Visiting Nurse Association could provide in home physical therapy but only if my husband were in Norwich at our home. I could not leave him alone in our Norwich apartment for a VNA nurse or physical therapist to come in for an hour or two; sometimes I worked 16 hour shifts and my parents would pick my son up from school and bring him to their workplaces.

As a consequence of all of this bureaucracy and financial need in my family, my husband essentially received no physical therapy after his stroke. If anyone here today has a family member who suffered a stroke, then they know how essential physical therapy is. My husband received essentially no treatment for his stroke because I needed to work and could not afford to take time off.

Paid family and medical leave from the fund proposed would have allowed me to stay with my husband as he recovered but I didn't have any such protection. I feel comfortable saying that some type of paid leave would have prevented my husband from being as disabled as he is today. He doesn't work. He stays at home and cries.

Eventually the strain of all of these problems caused our marriage to collapse. We divorced and I remarried and gave birth to a daughter. My son lives with my ex-husband and cares for him with all of his schoolwork and soccer and lacrosse practices. Despite his parents' turmoil, he is graduating this year from Norwich Technical High School. He has shouldered more adult responsibility than many adults I know. I wish I had been able to do more to help him, but, as before, I needed to work.

My employer doesn't offer paid sick days or family leave because she has fewer than 50 employees. But sometimes when my baby coughs or has a fever, I wonder what would happen if I had to work and not take care of him.

The laws you are considering today can change lives, maybe even save some. **I urge you to vote for 6932 to provide paid family and medical leave.**

Shari Smith