

COMMISSION OFFICERS

Antonia Moran, *Chair*
Mary Lee A. Kiernan, *Vice Chair*
Lucia A. Aschettino, *Secretary*
Catherine Ernsky, *Treasurer*

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Carolyn M. Treiss

Connecticut General Assembly



PCSW

Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

The State's leading force for women's equality

COMMISSIONERS

Maritza Bond
JoAnn Calnen
April Capone
Susan Eastwood
Karen Jarmoe
Jennifer Just
Kristin A. LaFleur
Holly Masi
Hilda C. Nieves
Melanie O'Brien
Helene Shay
Susan Toliver
Patricia E.M. Whitcombe

HONORARY MEMBERS

Barbara DeBaptiste
Connie Dice
Patricia T. Hendel
Patricia Russo

**Testimony of
The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Labor and Public Employees Committee
February 24, 2015**

Re: H.B. 6244, AAC Parents and Guardians of Crime Victims and Unemployment Benefits.

Senators Winfield and Hwang, Representatives Tercyak and Rutigliano, and distinguished members of the Labor Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) on **H.B. 6244, AAC Parents and Guardians of Crime Victims and Unemployment Benefits.**

H.B. 6244 would allow parents to collect unemployment benefits when caring for their child who has been victimized by crime. The intent of this bill is admirable – parents, whose child has experienced the trauma of crime victimization and who find themselves unemployed as a result, should be able to have the comfort of some income coming into the home during what is an unimaginably difficult time.

When a child has been the victim of a crime, such as sexual assault, parents undoubtedly want to take care of them. Many workers, however, do not have access to adequate paid time off to do so. Currently, the Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which provides for extended unpaid time off, applies only to employees that work for employers of a certain size. Many workers who are fortunate to work for large enough employers, and are therefore eligible for FMLA, are unable to take advantage of the leave afforded under the Act because they cannot afford to miss a paycheck.

The PCSW respectfully suggests that the committee think more broadly and boldly. Retrofitting any program, such as Unemployment Insurance or Workers' Compensation, to address a specific circumstance that was not necessarily intended for that program, can be problematic. Therefore, we recommend the committee consider the creation of a program that from the outset is designed to

address many of the various situations that arise when individuals become ill, such as when firefighters are diagnosed with cancer, or when family members must care for one another, such as when parents must care for a child victimized by crime. Rather than every year having to debate the merits of alterations to existing programs to meet a specifically identified need, why not consider a state-wide system of paid family and medical leave?

Moving Connecticut to a system of paid family and medical leave, where all employees contribute to the system and are afforded the benefit of accessing paid time off to care for themselves, a child or an aging parent would go a long way in supporting workers economically and emotionally through often difficult and challenging circumstances. In the situation this legislation is attempting to address, parents of children who have experienced a traumatic event would be afforded the ability to take time away from work to provide the love and support necessary to help their children recover without having to deal with the stress of loss of employment and income.

We applaud the committee for your attention to the needs of those who find themselves out of work due to trauma and illness, of their own or their families, and we look forward to an ongoing conversation about how best to address these situations.