

Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW
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In support of raised *Senate Bill 221 An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave*

Good afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and honorable members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Gretchen Raffa and I'm the Director of Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support of raised *Senate Bill 221 An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 64,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services in 17 health centers across the state. As a health care provider and advocate, Planned Parenthood's top priority is ensuring that all individuals have access to the health care and information they need, including the full range of reproductive health services, to make positive sexual and reproductive health decisions.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England believes that every individual has the right to determine their own reproductive destiny and understands that right is directly linked to the conditions in their communities. That includes the right to plan their families, live in safe and healthy environments and to control their bodies, their gender and their sexuality. As advocates for reproductive justice we must consider all aspects of a person's life including those that may affect their economic stability. We see that families are constantly evolving and take many forms including blended families, single-parent families, LGBTQ families, chosen families and multigenerational families. Yet public policy has not kept up with what American families look like today. Therefore, it is important to recognize that even with marriage equality for same sex couples, policies must include individuals who choose not to marry—or who rely on extended family members or families of choice for care—are not excluded from workplace leave laws.ⁱ

We support SB 221 and would like to suggest amending the bill to expand the definition of family in section 14 & 15 and throughout the bill where family members are defined to a more inclusive definition. In addition to listing specific family members, we support adding to that definition “any individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a family relationship.” The simple fact is for the LGBTQ community unanticipated life challenges can often be more daunting, as LGBTQ workers and families are often struggling with lack of government recognition depending on what state you live in, social intolerance, economic injustice, employment discrimination, and laws and policies that fail to support workers with health and caregiving needs.ⁱⁱ In addition, as a result of rejection from blood family, many LGBTQ people are forced to create families of their own made up of non-traditional networks of care.

We understand that family defined for some LGBTQ people include close relationships regardless of biological tie and outside same sex marriage. LGBTQ workers are more likely to need time off to address personal or family health matters. Researchers have documented clear health disparities in the LGBTQ community, including a higher risk for certain cancers, HIV/AIDS, diabetes, arthritis, and other chronic conditions.ⁱⁱⁱ It is a reproductive injustice if we do not acknowledge the evolving definition of family in our state and promote workplace leave policy that would be fully inclusive of LGBTQ families. As a queer non-married woman, having a more inclusive family leave policy would personally benefit me because it would include members outside my blood family to also include my chosen family, whom I rely on regularly for the kind of care this bill seeks to address. The chosen family I am grateful for who have served as caregivers to me when I was ill and in every sense of the word, my family.

There are an estimated 5.4 million LGBTQ workers in the United States, and a large percentage of these workers have family caregiving responsibilities. Researchers have also estimated that 37% of LGBTQ-identified adults—or three million LGBTQ Americans—have had a child at some point in their lives; based on these figures, six million American children and adults have an LGBT parent.^{iv} Research has shown that LGBTQ Americans, especially older LGBT adults, are more likely than the population at large to rely on “families of choice”—or a network of close friends—when they need care or help in an emergency.^v That is why it is critically important to have the most inclusive definition of family in this legislation.

Connecticut has been a leader in family friendly workplace policies. FMLA (The Family Medical Leave Act) was groundbreaking in its time but let's face it, it isn't working for the majority who simply cannot afford to use it. 78% of CT workers who are eligible for FMLA won't take it because they cannot afford to go without the pay. The current lack of paid family and medical leave reduces the chance that a caregiver stays employed at their current job. Women of color are less likely to have access to paid maternity leave, and the odds decrease for all women the younger they are or the less

education they have.^{vi} Those earning the least in our economy—the young, the less educated, and people of color—are also the most likely to have to leave their jobs and to experience a wage-drop after changing employers.^{vii}

We must continue to move forward and update laws and policies to ensure a more equitable and just society. If passed, Paid Family and Medical Leave would provide security for the families who need it most. No one should have to choose between their financial security and taking care of themselves or someone that they love. It would not only strengthen our family units but it would strengthen our workforce. Employees who know that they have security in their job perform at higher levels. We urge you to support *Senate Bill 221 An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave* and amend it to include a more inclusive definition of family. This will protect the basic rights of Connecticut workers by guaranteeing and promoting the health and economic security of all Connecticut citizens which would allow for families to thrive instead of barely survive.

ⁱ Time for a Change: The Case for LGBT-Inclusive Workplace Leave Laws & Nondiscrimination Protections

<http://www.abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/general/reports/TimeforaChangeFullReport.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Gary J. Gates, LGBT Parenting in the United States (Williams Institute, February 2013), 1, <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Parenting.pdf>

^v Time for a Change: The Case for LGBT-Inclusive Workplace Leave Laws & Nondiscrimination Protections

<http://www.abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/general/reports/TimeforaChangeFullReport.pdf>

^{vi} U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers: 1961–2008,” (Washington, DC: Department of Commerce, 2011).

^{vii} 5 Bureau of Labor Statistics, Highlights of Women’s Earnings in 2010 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010), available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2010.pdf>