

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut  
Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee  
March 8, 2016**

**IN SUPPORT OF  
S.B. 221 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE**

Good afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental health conditions. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for quality of life for individuals and families in the community. I am here today to testify on behalf of NAMI Connecticut in support of *SB 221 An Act Concerning Paid Family Medical Leave*.

Thank you for raising this important bill again this session. Currently many families are left to struggle when a household earner becomes seriously ill, has a baby or needs to take care of a family member, which can happen to all of us and does happen to many of us. As a state, and nation, that supports family values, we can and should be doing more for working people. We can truly support family values at work by creating a state-wide system of paid family and medical leave.

- Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is not working for most people. While the passage of the FMLA was groundbreaking in the early 90's, it is not working for most employees. **78% of those eligible for FMLA don't take it because it is unpaid** and many employees aren't even eligible for this unpaid leave because their employer doesn't meet the number threshold of employees.
- Paid family and medical leave would yield enormous benefits for all employees. When employees have access to paid family and medical leave and know that they can take time off when they need it most, they will be less stressed about potentially juggling the demands of work and also caring for a loved one, and less stressed in the event their family member does become sick. They will experience **better health, including mental health, and therefore will be more productive** – a benefit for employees as well as employers.
- There would be little cost to employers. The system that is being suggested would be fully funded by employees with no employer contribution. According to The Institute for Women's Policy Research, the cost to Connecticut employees would be very low at just a quarter of one percent of someone's income. Lower wage employees would pay less because contributions are calculated by a percentage. **This is a very small investment that would provide workers with a huge benefit.**

- Connecticut has historically been a leader on paid leave issues. We were the first state in the nation to pass our own family and medical leave bill and were the first to pass paid sick days legislation. We now have a **tremendous opportunity to be a leader** on paid family and medical leave and set an example for the rest of the nation.

We also strongly support the inclusion of additional important family members who can benefit from this mostly self-funded program. The proposal includes employees' family members such as siblings, grandparents and grandchildren, to go beyond the currently covered roles of parents, children and spouses. Those family members may need just as much need care for health conditions or disabilities, when those conditions temporarily became more serious requiring extra help from a family member. Also, adults, especially young adults, without a spouse or child, would most often rely on their parents in this situation.

This investment in workers' wellbeing and productivity is especially crucial for families who experience challenges with mental health conditions. An employee who is dealing with a mental health condition may need more time off during an especially difficult period than paid sick days afford him/her, while remaining willing and ready to return to work once s/he is able to take care of this health situation. An employee who has a family member who is dealing with a difficult time with a mental health condition might need some extra time as well. This family member could be a parent, child or sibling of any age.

On a more personal note, growing up in Germany my mother told me many times how much it meant for her and the bond with her new baby, me, that she was able to stay home through paid family leave – which is something mothers and fathers in Connecticut should be able to experience as well.

As the above makes clear, passing this bill would be a win-win for hardworking residents of Connecticut and their families *and* the state's economy.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please let me know if I can answer any questions for you.

Respectfully,  
Daniela Giordano