

March 8th, 2016

Dear Members of the Labor Committee,

My Name is Dina Lara and I am writing in speaking in support of SB 221, a bill that would establish a paid family and medical leave program in Connecticut.

Until last year, I worked for a New Haven-based healthcare agency as a CAN/LPN. I have worked in the healthcare field now for 28 years and I still make just ten dollars an hour. In February, I underwent gallbladder surgery. I took a few days off to recuperate, unpaid. My doctor told me that I should rest for a few weeks, but I got right back to work because I live paycheck-to-paycheck and missing one paycheck means I cannot pay my bills. When I returned to work, my weekly hours were slashed from 54 per week to 14. I complained about this. It wasn't my choice to need surgery – why should I be punished for it? They raised my hours to about 30 per week.

Approximately one month after I went back, I was feeling so lightheaded at work that I needed to sit down. The next thing I knew was that I was being rushed to the hospital for complications from my surgery. I was in the hospital – and missed work – for three more days.

The surgeon told me: “Dina, you need to rest!” So I asked him: “Are you going to pay my bills?” When I returned to work, I was given a disciplinary warning – with “friendly reminder” written at the top – that I had missed eight days of work in 2015 for my surgery and the return to the hospital.

Because of this experience, I began speaking out in favor of workplace protections. I was then fired to speaking out. I received no pay for any of the days I missed and I lost my job. All because I had necessary surgery.

If I had been able to take paid time off when I had my surgery, enough time to heal properly, I would not have needed to go to the hospital again, and I would not have lost my job. Not having paid family and medical leave actually ended up making me even sicker.

We need a Paid Family and Medical Leave program so hard workers like me don't lose their income just because we are human and get sick! Please pass SB 221 this year!

Dina Lara
West Haven