

Hartford Paid Family Leave Public Hearing, March 8th, 2016

Paid Family Leave not only positively affects working woman but also men, children and **businesses**. There has been much research conducted on how family friendly policies lead to higher productivity and higher profitability for companies, government and the nation as a whole.

In California, where a Paid Family Leave bill was passed over a decade ago, a study conducted by the Department of Labor in 2014 showed, somewhat counterintuitively, that its small businesses that report better results. This is most likely because of the lack of employee turnover and the level of dedication that happy employees perform at which leads to more successful businesses.

A study conducted last year by Lean In and McKinsey & Company called Women in the Workplace, highlighted that female leadership is crucial for organizations to perform at the highest levels. However, based on the slow rate of progress over the last few years, it would take twenty-five years to reach gender parity at the senior-VP level and more than **one hundred** years in the C-suite! Family friendly policies in the workplace has a direct impact on women staying in the workforce and eventually graduating to leadership positions.

The United States Department of Labor in September of last year issued a report called The Cost of Doing Nothing, which describes the cost to families, businesses and the nation of not empowering women to stay in the workforce. On every front it was underlined that enticing women to stay committed to their careers adds economic dollars to households, corporations and the country. In fact, the Department of Labor Chief Economist estimates that if US women between ages 25 and 54 participated in the labor force at the same rate as they do in Canada or Germany, there would be more than five million additional women in the labor force which would translate into greater than *\$500 billion* of increased economic activity per year!

In November, 2015, The Wall Street Journal published an article on the very progressive Paid Family Leave Policy that the Credit Suisse Group introduced for their US employees late last year. Under this leave package, employees can utilize up to 20 weeks of paid leave after childbirth. The WSJ inferred that financial companies are competing to hire and retain talent against firms in Silicon Valley where family friendly policies have become common practice. Large corporations have started to catch on to the fact that in order to stay competitive, they need to keep employees happy. In that same regard, Connecticut needs to think about staying competitive and could risk losing families to other states that either already offer or will offer paid family leave. Three States currently have a Paid Family Leave plan. Two of them, Rhode Island and New Jersey border Connecticut. Recently, New York's Governor Cuomo proposed a 12 week Paid Family Leave plan for New York - yet another state that borders Connecticut. Last week, Governor Cuomo stated in Newsday Magazine that the New York Paid Family Leave plan, 'would be the most robust such program in the nation – and it would show the nation what it

means to stand up for and help working families'. Connecticut needs to think seriously about acting now to keep our families from leaving for more competitive state wide policies and it would be great to see **our** state be the one that leads the nation on the most robust plan yet!

We need cultural change to occur at its roots in corporations and in government. Paid Family Leave policy is also a starting point and gateway for achieving pay equity and for breaking glass ceilings. Most importantly, Paid Family Leave allows women and men from all socioeconomic classes to balance work and home lives and to *stay* in the workforce instead of having to choose between being employed or taking care of a newborn, sick child, spouse or parent. I was lucky enough to work at institutions that allowed me to take some time off during childbirth but unfortunately this is not the case for the majority of women. My mother was a single immigrant parent of three. I am sadly very familiar with the challenges that single parents face, often living pay check to pay check to provide basic necessities for their children. This is especially difficult for new single mothers. Not having the option of paid time off after childbirth is a challenge that many of them cannot overcome successfully.

While the entire developed world has progressed on Paid Family Leave policies, our country as a whole, unfortunately continues to lag.

Paid Family Leave has become a national discussion at a critical time for our families. The arguments against it are weak compared to the positives. The proposed Paid Family Leave Bill would not cost businesses anything. Instead, businesses would save the cost of employee turnover. Family friendly policies lead to contented employees and a content workforce leads to higher productivity within businesses and happier families at home.

With Connecticut being the progressive state that it is, it would be great to see it lead on this front and have the rest of the country learn and follow.

Dita Bhargava, Cos Cob, CT