



Testimony of
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Labor and Public Employees Committee Hearing
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SB 221 AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE

Good afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and members of the Labor Committee. My name is Jan Hochadel. I am the President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of more than 90 local unions representing more than 30,000 public and private sector employees. Our members include more than 15,000 teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses and other school personnel across the state. It is on their behalf that I appear before you to today.

Too often I see members who are confronting tragedy, whether it is staying with a sick child or caring for a dying parent. As a caring and just society, we know that they need to be with their families. Too often, however, people in this situation must choose between being with their family in a time of need and buying groceries. This is true for members in all of the diverse population we represent at AFT Connecticut. In many contracts for educators and state workers, the number of days for family leave is capped, so that even a dedicated employee who has hundreds of sick days can only stay with a desperately sick child for a week or so before moving to FMLA status without pay. Not only is the person then faced with a very difficult choice, but even if the employee financially has to go to back to work, how productive are they? Is it truly best for the employer to have distracted, often distraught employees at work?

SB 221 is a financially responsible response to this issue. The cost of the leave is not passed to the employer, but is derived from a Family Medical Leave Trust Fund that is created by a contribution of a percentage of weekly wages. In concept, this fund is not different from a sick bank that many contracts include. Programs such as these are workers taking care of other workers. They build a sense of community among employees that builds a stronger, more positive work environment. SB 221 is an important step to addressing the needs of our employees at their most vulnerable moments. It represents the type of society and workplace that reflect Connecticut's values. It does so in a manner that is not onerous to employers, but by creating a pool of contributions from the workers it helps. I strongly support and urge you to support SB 221.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.