

Companions & Homemakers, Inc.
Testimony Concerning Proposed Bill No. 221
Labor and Public Employees Committee
March 8, 2016

Good afternoon members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Jonathan Hunt, and I am the Director of Communications for Companions & Homemakers, Inc., a non-medical home-care agency serving the elderly population of Connecticut. I am here today to testify in opposition of proposed bill no. 221, "An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave."

I genuinely feel proposed bill 221 is well intended; I can respect and appreciate the good faith protections this bill seeks to impose. My concern comes from the standpoint of an employer, and the undue burden this bill may impose on like employers throughout the state.

The Family Medical Leave Act entitles eligible employees to take unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons, while maintaining health insurance and holding the position with his/her employer. In Connecticut, and in most common instances, employees may apply their accrued paid sick time, mandated to be available by the state, as well as fringe benefits such as other accrued paid time off in order to receive compensation during this absence. Individuals also have the option of purchasing their own, private short term disability insurance for these potential instances of need should they so choose.

My concern with instituting a paid leave is twofold. First and foremost, this protection is likely to be viewed as an owed benefit. By deducting regularly from one's pay each period, an individual is more apt to feel "owed" a return on the investment they've made, similar to that of Social Security, and be more likely inclined to apply for the 12 week period of paid time off. Employees would, understandably, feel this program is more of an earned benefit for casual use versus a safety-net protection for dire need. I all too often see this on a regular basis with paid sick time. As the new calendar year approaches, there is an influx of staff time off relative to "illness" in order to use the paid time off in lieu of losing it; not what the benefit is intended for, but reality just the same.

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Secondly, the undue burden and lack of staffing this will impose upon my employer and, specifically, the home care industry. As a home-care provider, the majority of our client base requires service regularly and consistently in order to remain within their homes. When an employee goes on medical leave, the work is not easily shifted to existing employees to absorb. In the case of office employees, training is often needed and client service often suffers. For field employees, the workload is not just added on, as in the case of a facility where an aide may have more patients to tend to, but instead, coverage must be secured for that client specifically, and compensated simultaneously as the employee on leave, until the regular employee is able to return. This added cost will certainly be felt by the elderly population of clientele who have already budgeted with a fixed income to live out their final years within their homes.

For these reasons, I oppose raised bill 221. Thank you for your time, and I welcome and questions.