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**Written Testimony – Juan Hernandez  
Connecticut District Director SEIU 32BJ**

**Labor and Public Employees Committee**

**Senate Bill No. 221, “An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave”**

On behalf of 32BJ SEIU I am proud to issue my support for Senate Bill No. 221.

32BJ represents over 145,000 women and men working in the property services industry across the East Coast, including over 4,000 members here in Connecticut. Our membership hails from 64 different countries and speaks 28 different languages but we are united by the cause of raising industry standards and transforming low wage jobs into family sustaining livelihoods.

Access to paid family and medical leave is a vital step on this path.

A full-time union cleaner in Connecticut’s metropolitan centers currently earns between \$26,000 and \$31,000 a year.<sup>i</sup> At this wage level workers spend a high portion of their income on month-to-month expenses and struggle to set aside savings to offset extended periods of lost wages. Without paid leave, workers are faced with the decision of maintaining an income and paying their bills, or receiving the medical treatment they need or providing care for family members.

At times of child birth economic insecurity can be further exacerbated. In the month their child is born 12.9% of families fall below the poverty line, a figure that increases to 24.6% when a female is the head of the household.<sup>ii</sup>

This Bill will ensure that workers in Connecticut have the economic security they need to provide for their families at life’s pivotal moments.

Longer time-off at the time of child birth has positive health impacts for parents and children. Longer periods of leave are associated with both lower rates of postpartum depressive symptoms and demonstrable reductions in infant mortality.<sup>iii</sup> As it currently stands higher earning and higher educated women have greater access to paid leave, resulting in them being able to spend longer period of time with their new born babies.<sup>iv</sup>

Giving a child the right start in life should not be a privilege for the wealthy few. This Bill directly addresses this disparity by removing the financial barriers to taking leave by providing complete income replacement for workers earning up to \$52,000 a year.

Paid family and medical leave is also the right thing to do for Connecticut’s economy. A lack of access to paid leave reduces workforce participation rates amongst women, acting as a drag on one of the main drivers of economic growth.

Paid leave also drastically increases employee retention and reduces subsequent spending on hiring and training.<sup>v</sup> The employee funded insurance model proposed by this Bill will particularly assist the attraction and retention of employees for small business who struggle to provide benefits on par with large employers.

Passing this Bill will position Connecticut as a national leader on paid family and medical leave. The Bills provisions exceed the number of weeks available in the three state schemes currently in place<sup>vi</sup> and match those currently proposed in New York<sup>vii</sup> and Washington DC.<sup>viii</sup>

Connecticut has a proud history of standing by working families and leading the way on family and medical leave. By introducing a paid insurance scheme we will complete the policy loop and ensure that leave is truly accessible to all workers.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.seiu32bj.org/contracts/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/us0211webwcover.pdf> (pg. 38)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/us0211webwcover.pdf> (pg. 37)

<sup>iv</sup> [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/leave\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/leave_report_final.pdf) (pg. 12)

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/report/2013/12/12/81036/the-economic-benefits-of-family-and-medical-leave-insurance/>

<sup>vi</sup> [http://www.abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/familyleave/fact\\_sheets/familyleavechart.pdf](http://www.abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/familyleave/fact_sheets/familyleavechart.pdf)

<sup>vii</sup> [http://www.abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/familyleave/fact\\_sheets/NYPFLcomparison.pdf](http://www.abetterbalance.org/web/images/stories/Documents/familyleave/fact_sheets/NYPFLcomparison.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> <http://lims.dccouncil.us/Legislation/B21-0415>