

I come today to appeal to you, the Legislature's Labor & Public Employees Committee, for your support of Senate Bill No. 221, An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave.

My name is Laraine Jones and I have lived in Connecticut for 26 years. I am a resident of Windsor. When I think about young women, who today are giving birth, and for many, are required to return to work after a short period of time after giving birth, sometimes 3 weeks or 4 weeks, my heart goes out to them, because quite honestly, I do not know or understand how they are able to do it.

When I think of my own first experience of giving birth almost 35 years ago in 1981, I am thankful for the experience that I had. I am thankful for the fact that I worked for a company in New York that was very supportive of me and this new chapter that I was writing in my life and the chapter the company was writing in support of maternity leave.

Giving birth is a very emotional time in one's life. I remember giving birth and the early weeks after giving birth. I am glad that I did not have to return to work after 8 weeks because it was only at that time that I was beginning to feel more like myself. It was only after about 8 weeks that I was able to begin to feel like I was getting a handle of my daily routine and schedule and now able to begin to feel comfortable and confident about my new role as a mother.

Dealing with my emotions was only one aspect of my experience. The other aspect of my motherhood journey was also the special time and bonding that I was able to experience with my new born son. This was indeed a very special time in my life and I am glad that I had the time to experience it with a very healthy and supportive network from my husband, family and my professional life. I was very blessed to know that I was going to be able to have the time to spend with my son during the early days of his life. At the time of my son's birth and based on my longevity with the company I worked for, I was able to take 13 weeks of paid leave. In addition, my department allowed me to take a full 6 months leave from my job, with a guarantee of my job upon my return to work.

I am truly thankful for my experience and the 6 months that I was able to spend with my son, before having to return to work. While I was only paid for a portion of my time off, to this day, I am still very thankful for the time I was afforded to take off and also knowing that my job was waiting for me upon my return. And when I returned to work, not only was my job waiting for me, but when I returned, I was given a promotion.

Now I realize that my circumstance is unique to me, but my appeal to you today is for you to see the tremendous need to provide legislation that will provide for a way to support parents and their new born at a very critical start of a baby's life. My grandmother would always say, "The way you start out, is the way you will end up." Just think, if, through SB No 221, the state of Connecticut can provide for a good foundational start in the life of a new born and his/her parent, the pay-off from this benefit, will be felt for years to come.

Today, I am the mother of two and I am happy to say, that through their nurturing, both my son and my daughter have grown to be very responsible and caring young adults, making tremendous contributions to the communities they serve.

I leave you with this final thought. For those of you who are married, but not yet with children or who have sons and daughters of your own who someday may have children, would you want anything less than what is being asked for in SB No 221 for yourself or for your sons and daughters? It is time for the state of Connecticut to show leadership and to move forward on making Paid Family and Medical Leave a reality for all Connecticut citizens. And so I urge you to move forward with SB No 221 and to make this Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave into law.