

To the distinguished members of the Labor Committee:

My name is Penny Phillips and my husband is John Shand. I am writing today to urge the passage of SB 221, An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave. The policy would be a boon to so many families under a multitude of tough situations, including in our case adoption.

My first daughter was adopted in 2000 from Kazakhstan. At the time, the adoption itself took two weeks to complete. My second daughter was adopted from the same orphanage two years later. That adoption took three weeks in country to complete. Today, an adoption from Kazakhstan requires a 2-3 month stay in country and two separate trips. Not many people can afford to take that much time away from work, so few families are adopting from this country.

In 2009, my oldest daughter was diagnosed with an inoperable malignant brain tumor. They gave her 3-9 months to live. At the time both of us were fully employed. We struggled through nine months until she passed away. Neither of us took more than a few weeks off to be with her. We were lucky to have very good health insurance at the time, and a friend who raised funds to help pay for her treatments and her funeral service.

We went on to adopt our third daughter from China in 2011. She came to the US at the age of seven and did not know any English. After spending two weeks in China to complete the adoption process, I was able to take 2 more weeks off from work, using up all my saved vacation time, to help her to adjust to her new school and life in a family. At the time, our company allowed vacation time to accrue, but that is no longer possible.

The hard reality for many Americans raising a family is that we're all just one illness, one tragedy away from losing everything. Our health insurance cost more and covers far less, and we cannot afford to stop work to be with our families or quit completely - even when the death of a child is certain.

That is why I feel so strongly about enacting Paid Family and Medical Leave in Connecticut. Please do the right thing and pass SB 221.

Thank you,
Penny Phillips & John Shand
Canton