



UNITED STATES SENATE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

**TESTIMONY OF
UNITED STATES SENATOR RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE
LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE**

MARCH 8, 2016

I appreciate the opportunity to support the pro-family policies embodied in Senate Bill 221, An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave. This legislation addresses the same concerns regarding family stability and support for our middle class working families as initiatives that I am supporting in the United States Congress.

Senate Bill 221 establishes a paid family and medical leave trust fund into which employees pay a percentage of their income. In return, the trust fund will provide compensation of up to \$1,000 per week for up to twelve weeks to an eligible worker who needs time off from work due to the birth of a child or a medical emergency involving a family member.

As a father of four, I know that the arrival of a new child is a momentous and joyous occasion. I believe that parents should have flexibility in their workplace that allows them to spend time with their children, especially during the formative period after a child's birth.

However, the United States remains as one of just a handful of countries that does not guarantee paid parental leave to new parents, or paid sick leave to working people. In fact, only 13 percent of the American workforce has access to paid family leave through their employer and fewer than 40 percent have access to personal medical leave through an employer-provided temporary disability program. American workers, and our economy as a whole, are most productive when workers do not have to choose between earning a paycheck or caring for themselves or their families.

Efforts to address the issue of paid family and medical leave are occurring at both the federal and state levels. As Connecticut is developing a proposal for workers in our state, I, along with many of my Senate colleagues are advocating for federal legislation. Specifically, we have introduced the Healthy Families Act and the Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act (FAMILY Act) to ensure that workers across the country are able to keep their jobs as they keep their families healthy.

In addition, my colleagues and I supported the President's request for \$2.2 billion for the Paid Leave Partnership Initiative and \$35 million for the State Paid Leave Fund at the Department of Labor. Regrettably, this funding was not approved in the final budget. At the agency level, the U.S. Department of Labor has issued a proposed rule requiring federal contractors to offer employees at least seven paid sick days per year.

This movement for common-sense, family fairness measures -- like most grassroots efforts -- must continue at both the federal and state levels.

So, while I continue to advocate for federal rules guaranteeing family and medical leave for all American workers, I urge the Labor and Public Employees Committee to favorably consider legislation such as Senate Bill 221 which provides critical financial support for Connecticut workers who need personal time to address an important family situation.