

Connecticut

Labor and Public Employees Committee, February 14, 2019
Testimony of AARP in Support of
Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance (S.B. 1 & H.B. 5003)

AARP is a nonpartisan, social mission organization with an age 50+ membership of nearly 38 million nationwide, and approximately 600,000 members here in Connecticut. We fight for issues that matter most to older adults and their families such as healthcare, family caregiving, and retirement security, and today we express our strong support for paid family medical leave insurance.

Family caregivers are the backbone of Connecticut's long-term care system. They are the first line of assistance for most people, helping to make it possible for older adults and people with disabilities to remain at home, and out of costly, taxpayer-funded institutions like nursing homes.

According to the *Caregiving in the U.S. 2015* survey, conducted by the National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP's Public Policy Institute, the typical family caregiver in the U.S. is a 49-year-old woman who works outside the home and spends about 18 hours per week—almost another part-time-job—providing unpaid care to an adult relative for about 4 years.

According to AARP's *Valuing the Invaluable: 2015 Update*, in 2013 alone, Connecticut's 459,000 family caregivers provided 427 million hours of unpaid care to their parents, spouses and other loved ones. This care has been estimated to have a value of \$5.9 billion annually. Family caregivers not only help with bathing and dressing, transportation, shopping, meals, and managing finances; roughly half of them are now performing complicated medical and nursing tasks that were once provided only in hospitals and nursing homes and by home care professionals.

Working family caregivers have varying needs. Whether they work full time or part time, they must often divert attention away from their jobs to make work-related adjustments to accommodate the needs of the person who needs care. The vast majority (74 percent) of family caregivers have worked at a paying job at some point during their caregiving experience, and most (58 percent) are currently employed either full-time or part-time, setting up a stressful juggling act between work, their caregiving role, and other family responsibilities. And when work requirements conflict with family obligations, some employed family caregivers have to make difficult decisions that can lead to lost wages and missed career opportunities.

National estimates have shown that the lifetime income-related losses sustained by family caregivers age 50 and older who leave the workforce to care for a parent can

reach about \$115,900 in wages, \$137,980 in Social Security benefits, and conservatively, \$50,000 in pension benefits. That's a total of \$283,716 for men and \$324,044 for women in lost income and benefits over a family caregiver's lifetime. While some legal protections—such as the national Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)—provide a useful benefit for some employees to maintain job security when they need to take time off from work, it is important to note that FMLA is unpaid leave. Many workers in the U.S. are not even eligible for FMLA because the law only applies to businesses with more than 50 employees, and it also restricts the family members needing care to a minor child, a parent, dependent adult child, or spouse.

The practical reality is that many workers, struggling to make ends meet from paycheck to paycheck, simply cannot afford to take unpaid leave. AARP is fighting for paid family leave in Connecticut because we believe family caregivers should not have to choose between taking care of mom or dad, or losing a paycheck, or even risk losing their job. Without paid leave and flexible workplace policies to support unpaid family caregivers, vulnerable seniors will increasingly be forced into taxpayer supported nursing homes to receive the care they need, which would add even more pressure on Connecticut's already strained budget.

Another dimension of family caregiving that is important to note is the future availability of family caregivers. A 2013 AARP report, *The Aging of the Baby Boom and the Growing Care Gap: A Look at Future Declines in the Availability of Family Caregivers* revealed that the availability of potential family caregivers (mostly adult children) to provide long term services and supports is expected to decline dramatically and overall care burdens will likely intensify—especially as baby boomers move into late old age. Since fewer family caregivers will be available in the years ahead, it will be essential to make sure they are supported.

AARP believes that paid family leave is a commonsense plan that would allow employees to contribute to and access a limited amount of paid time off from work. The purpose behind a paid family leave program is to offset lost income while a worker is recovering from a serious medical emergency or else caring for a loved one. A well-crafted paid family leave program would provide employees with the security of knowing they will not lose their job. Such a program could be completely funded by employees who will benefit from the program with no expectation that employers would contribute to funding the program.

All of our neighboring states—Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey and Rhode Island—already passed paid family leave programs. And, Washington State passed a bipartisan proposal similar to the proposals contained in S.B. 1 & H.B. 5003 that was supported by the Washington Hospitality Association, small businesses, labor groups, AARP and large, high-tech companies like Microsoft. We urge the Committee to advance paid family leave so that Connecticut residents have the security to raise a family and provide care to older parents without fear of losing a paycheck or their job.