



Connecticut Association for Human Services  
237 Hamilton Street, Suite 208  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106  
www.cahs.org

Elsa Núñez, President  
Robert Blakey, CFO & Interim CEO  
860.951.2212  
860.951.6511 fax

**Testimony before the Committee on Labor and Public Employees, February 14, 2019  
in Support of S.B. 1, AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE, and  
H.B. 5003, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE PROGRAM.**

Good Afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and Members of the Committee on Labor and Public Employees.

My name is Emily Coffey. I am an MSW student at UConn Hartford's School of Social Work. I am testifying today as part of my field placement for the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit agency that works to reduce poverty and promote equity and economic success for children and families through both policy and program initiatives.

I am here today in support of S.B. 1, An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave, and H.B. 5003, An Act Implementing a Paid Family and Medical Leave Program. These bills would create a public insurance system, paid with employee contributions, creating a new program that will protect children and families in the state.

Every day, families in the state of Connecticut must juggle between employment and family responsibilities. Compared to 183 other countries, the United States is the only one without a family paid leave plan.<sup>1</sup> As a good first step, the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was passed in 1993, giving hard-working families and individuals the ability to take unpaid time off in the event of hardship.<sup>2</sup> However, only 59% of working individuals in Connecticut can access the FMLA,<sup>3</sup> and FMLA is not a paid leave plan, which limits access for families who need a paycheck to live.

In the event of a family medical crisis or the birth of a child, low-wage, hourly workers are less likely to have access to any time off, let alone paid time off. Subsequently, these employees, who barely make ends meet from month to month, face impossible choices when life events happen, such as caring for a newborn or taking time to care for a sick relative. While both men and women would be eligible to benefit from paid leave, it is often the woman in the family that is the primary caregiver for ill parents and young children.

Additionally we know that the time parents spend with new babies is important to the baby's development:

- In an infant's early developmental stages, the right hemisphere of the brain connects the limbic system and the automatic nervous system, which is the stress response. The effects of a secure

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bloombergview.com/quicktake/family-leave>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ct.gov/dmhas/lib/dmhas/hrd/fmla-understanding.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> diversitydatakids.org. (2015). *Working Adults Who Are Eligible For and Can Afford FMLA Unpaid Leave (Share)*. Brandeis University, The Heller School, Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy Publication. Retrieved 24 January 2018, from <http://www.diversitydatakids.org/data/ranking/529/working-adults-who-are-eligible-for-and-can-afford-fmla-unpaid-leave-share/#loct=2&cat=44,25&tf=17>; Workers are considered unable to take unpaid FMLA leave because they are either ineligible based on employer size or job tenure requirements or because 12 weeks of lost wages from unpaid leave would result in their family income dropping to or under 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

positive attachment between a child and the caretaker have significance on brain development and infant mental health.<sup>4</sup>

- Research suggests that mothers healing from childbirth should take up to 12 weeks before returning to work. Returning to work too early can cause a new mother a heightened risk of postpartum depression as well as needing time to bond with their newborn.<sup>5</sup>
- Fathers that take the time off after the birth of a child become more involved in the direct care.
- Studies show that sick children recover at a faster rate when taken care of by their parents.<sup>6</sup> Parents that take time off to be with sick children not only improve children's health, but strengthen the family bond, giving children the security they need to thrive.<sup>7</sup>

Connecticut families should not have to struggle with choosing between a job, their health, or the health of their family. Affordable, accessible, publicly administered paid family leave will ensure that hardworking Connecticut residents can take the time needed for their medical, parental, and care-giving responsibilities without falling behind on their bills.

Passing a progressive paid leave system in Connecticut would support workers and families. No parent or adult with elderly dependents should be forced to choose between caring for the family they love and keeping the job they need. CAHS urges the Committee and full General Assembly to support S.B. 1 and H.B. 5003. They will help Connecticut to remain economically competitive and give working families in our state the support they deserve.

Thank you for your time.

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<sup>4</sup> Schore, A. N. (2001). Effects of a secure attachment relationship on right brain development, affect regulation, and infant mental health. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 22(1/2), 7-66.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.modernmom.com/2c3305a2-051f-11e2-9d62-404062497d7e.html>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/paid-leave/children-benefit-when-parents.pdf>