



**Testimony for Public Hearing
Labor and Public Employees Committee
February 14, 2019**

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**S.B. 1: An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave.
H.B. 5003: An Act Implementing a Paid Family Medical Leave Program.**

Chairs and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, I write in support of S.B. 1 and H.B. 5003. These bills will create and implement a comprehensive, statewide system of paid family and medical leave for workers needing to take time off to care for themselves or a loved one. The mission of our organization is framed around reproductive freedom, which includes the right to have children. Reproductive rights are essential for achieving gender equity.

Paid family and medical leave is a vital component of supporting women so that they can choose to have children and so that they can take the leave they need to meet their healthcare needs and those of their children, all without falling into debt. We strongly affirm the rights of individuals to have children. But for many low-wage workers, this right is limited through the financial burdens represented by their lack of access to paid family and medical leave.

Although many workers are guaranteed unpaid leave, this relies on families having at least some form of savings to allow them to cover expenses while taking this leave. Only 12% of private and 17% of public sector workers have access to paid leave through their employer, meaning that for the majority of working families, unpaid leave is currently their only option. Data from the Federal Reserve Board showed that in 2015, 46% of adults in the U.S. said that they either could not cover an emergency expense costing \$400, or would cover it by selling something or borrowing money.ⁱ Bureau of Labor Statistics data for the Hartford area shows that average expenditures on housing alone are 35% of household income, with transportation costs taking up a further 13%, food 12%, and healthcare 8%.ⁱⁱ Nationwide, just 41% of workers who are in the lowest 10% of earnings have access to paid vacation days, compared with 93% of those in the top 10%.ⁱⁱⁱ These statistics help highlight the fact that many lower- and middle-income families currently struggle to have the kinds of economic resources that allow them to take advantage of unpaid leave and many do not even have access to paid vacation days to use to even take just a few days or weeks of paid leave after the birth of a child.

Every worker in Connecticut deserves access to paid family and medical leave. Reproductive freedom requires having real choices to support becoming a parent, as well as those relating to controlling reproductive health. Deciding to become a parent with the knowledge that paid leave is available, and that when other caregiving duties – such as caring for elderly parents – are



required, that daycare bills and other expenses can still be met, provides working families with the support they need. Providing paid leave to all individuals who face caregiving responsibilities also supports equitable caregiving and further contributes to gender equity.

As this legislation moves forward, we also urge committee members to make sure that this is a program that genuinely works for all households in our state. We support legislation that provides 100% wage replacement for low-income households and that includes an inclusive definition of family. In moving this policy forward, paid family and medical leave should be accessible to all, regardless of income level or family structure – without these protections, some of the people who most need this leave would not be able to access it.

Paid leave is vital for working families and is a vital issue for supporting reproductive freedom. Connecticut residents cannot afford for us to wait. We urge you to make 2019 the year that you pass this legislation.

ⁱ Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. May 2016. *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2015*.

ⁱⁱ Bureau of Labor Statistics. January 2018. *Hartford, CT, Area Economic Summary*. Accessed at: https://www.bls.gov/regions/new-england/summary/blssummary_hartford.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2017. *Employee Benefits in the United States*. Accessed at: <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2017/ebbl0061.pdf>