

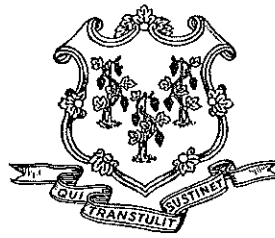
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Testimony of Senator Mae Flexer

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

And S.B. 765

An Act Ensuring Fair and Equal Pay for Equal Work

Labor and Public Employees Committee Public Hearing

February 14, 2019

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee: I offer this testimony in strong support of S.B. 1, An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave; H.B. 5003, An Act Implementing a Paid Family and Medical Leave Program; and S.B. 765, An Act Ensuring Fair and Equal Pay for Equal Work.

Senate Bill 1, An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave and House Bill 5003, An Act Implementing a Paid Family and Medical Leave Program

Nearly thirty years ago, Connecticut established itself as a leader by passing a state Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that offered 16 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave, for workers to recover from an illness, nurture a new baby, or care for a sick family member. Presently, however, many Connecticut workers are not covered by or even eligible for the state's FMLA. Even the majority of those that do qualify are unable to afford an unpaid leave. Only 17% of workers – including just 6% of low-wage workers – have access to any kind of paid leave through their employer.¹

In 2013, I voted along with my colleagues in the legislature to pass a law to establish a study on how best to implement Paid Family and Medical Leave in our state. Since then, I have worked to keep the conversation alive from year to year, yet have watched as our surrounding states have surpassed our leadership to establish programs of their own. Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey have passed and implemented successful paid leave programs. Massachusetts passed paid leave in 2018, and Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine have similar legislation pending.² It is time for Connecticut workers to reap the same rewards as their neighbors.

At some point in our lives, nearly all of us, regardless of party affiliation, will need time away from work to recover from a serious illness or to care for a sick loved one or a new

¹ <https://fmli.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/2019-talking-points-w-campaign-members.pdf>

² <https://fmli.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/2019-talking-points-w-campaign-members.pdf>

child. No Connecticut worker should be forced to choose between the family they love and the job they need. It is critical that while we catch up to our neighbors on Paid Family and Medical Leave, that we also lead. We need a system that is portable, accessible to all workers, and publically run. The benefit needs to be at least \$1,000 a week so that those who live pay check to pay check can actually use this benefit and care for a loved one. I respectfully urge the Committee to support this legislation as strongly as I do.

Senate Bill 765, An Act Ensuring Fair and Equal Pay for Equal Work

S.B. 765 is critically important to help close the wage gap in Connecticut once and for all. While there have been efforts that I have been a part of in the past to combat this issue, Connecticut women continue to earn 83 cents to every dollar that their male counterparts are making. This gap only increases for African American and Latino women.

Pay inequity harms our families and employers, while also robbing our economy of billions of dollars. There is no reason we shouldn't be able to close the pay gap, and soon. A fair workplace may only be achieved if all employees are guaranteed to receive fair and equal pay for equal work. The bill we passed last year was an important step forward, but was not the strongest measure we could have adopted. S.B. 765 will allow those who experience pay discrimination to hold their employers accountable. Employees should have a right to take action on these matters.

I strongly urge you to support S.B. 765 in order to provide a brighter economic future for our state and all of its residents.