

Anderson, Bryan

From: Timh Gabriele <timh.gabriele@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 12, 2019 8:15 PM
To: LABTestimony
Subject: S.B.1- AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE and H.B. 003- AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A PAID FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE PROGRAM.

Dear Members of Labor and Public Employees Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Tim Gabriele and I live in North Haven, Connecticut. I stand 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.

I have two wonderful children, both unique in their own way. For my second child, I was very fortunate to get a version of paid leave in which vacation and sick days were pooled into a form of paid parental leave by my employer. This allowed me to really connect with my child at a stage of development that anyone who studies child development will tell you is absolutely crucial. It allowed my wife and I to bond with our baby and develop an early nurturing relationship with him as he first explored the world. This stage only occurs once in a child's life and it should be every parent's right, not their privilege, to enjoy it without the fear of their early bonding experiences being curtailed by the punitive and authoritarian demands of the American workplace. We were able to avoid this with our second child not because CT law demanded it or because it was standard practice among CT employers, but because my union, Local 34 in New Haven, had fought and demanded it years before.

Unfortunately, the less preferable scenario is exactly what happened with our first child, born in Pennsylvania in 2010. My wife's employer, a small business who hired a number of workers under the table to skirt the rules of FMLA, provided their workers with no paid time off. Though they made it clear they were under no obligation to do so, they allowed certain families to take unpaid leave, but the repercussion was that they would be leaving their job and dropped from their health care plan during the time they chose to take off, even if the position would be held for them. Being in Sales, my wife was able to work out a scenario where she could use a combination of accumulated vacation days and time working "on the road" to care for our newborn daughter during this crucial stage of development. I, on the other hand, worked at a job where I had a total of 5 paid days off (with no distinction between sick and vacation time) and had already used some of this time for ultrasounds, screenings, and the delivery and surgical recovery process from my wife's C-section. I was able to take some time off, but did not get paid during this time.

In the scenario above, we got off pretty easy compared to what other parents have faced. We were fortunate enough to have some savings to account for the unpaid days, and my wife's flexibility allowed for her to still spend some time for our child while sliding into a bit of a debt. Still, being that our daughter was born with a medical condition that required highly invasive surgery at 6 months old, along with an array of tests and visits to go along with that, put us in an extremely stressful place. Not only were we facing monstrous deductibles, but we had to face those without the benefit of a paycheck coming in from at least one parent whenever we had to miss work. Our child, who required extra care was forced to stay at an in-home day care center (we couldn't afford a certified facility) at a time long before the 6 weeks most facilities and pediatricians recommend waiting before starting child care. It's safe to say that the stress surrounding the uncertainty of the impending surgery would have a great challenge to our family regardless of whether

we had paid family leave or not, but the structural barriers put in place by the for-profit healthcare industry in conjunction with the brutal and inhumane labor standards imposed by 40 years of market neoliberalization that obliterated the social safety net, made a time when we should have been basking in the love of our beautiful baby girl into a Kafka-esque nightmare of navigating arcane insurance billing statements, managing work and doctor schedules, scrounging for rent and utility money, and coping with the anxiety associated with medical uncertainty and financial hardship, all while attempting to hold down two full-time high-stress jobs that we could lose at any minute.

Our laws seem to have been designed for a different time, one in which nearby family support systems could step in to assist or a single earner household could rely on the unpaid labor of a stay-at-home spouse to do the tough job of raising families. In a time where the idea of single earner household only seems to apply to single parents and where the elders of working families are increasingly working past retirement age themselves, FMLA's guarantee of unpaid leave alone (only applicable to work environments that hire over 50 workers) is positively draconian and reeks of exploitation.

Overwhelmingly, CT voters support paid family and medical leave- along bipartisan lines. CT should be leading the way in showing the country, as numerous other states have already demonstrated, that paid leave can be a standard worth achieving and that the quality of life in our state is far higher than in states that prescribe human misery in order to gain a couple inches in productivity, precarity, and/or healthcare profiteering. The mobile, professional class that CT appears poised to court, now has options among states to live in that will put the needs of their family over the needs of their greedy bosses. We must put Connecticut on that list of options if we hope to attract top talent to our businesses and our communities. Furthermore, we must create a culture that encourages workplace democracy and constrains by law the worst impulses of unaccountable managers and executives to turn their employees into faucets of profit rather than fully vested participants in and beneficiaries of their own labor.

As it stands, the U.S. now lags behind Yemen, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo- nations identified last year by Global Citizen as the worst countries for women's rights- in providing paid maternity leave. This is a national disgrace. The U.S. should be a leader on this, but time and time again we have chosen business over families. CT should lead the way in altering this course and making our state a leader in policies that champion human dignity and support working families.

I strongly support S.B. 1 and H.B. 5003. I hope the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers will vote in favor of the future of Connecticut families and strive to continue to provide the highest quality of life that we can for those in need. Any tiered system that allows only the privileged, powerful, and lucky to observe time with their newborns, sick loved ones, or their own bodies as they recover from injury and illness is not one worth preserving. Please end the reign of inequality and inequity and restore justice to Connecticut families.

Thank you for your time,

Timothy Gabriele