

Testimony in Support of S.B. 1 and HB. 5003 An Act Implementing a Paid Family Medical Leave Program

My name is Karen Grava from Wallingford, Connecticut. I am the president of the Connecticut chapter of the American Association of University Women, an organization for college-educated women that advocates for the rights of girls and women. We strongly support 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.

This legislation strongly supports families and creates and implements a comprehensive, statewide system of paid family and medical leave for workers who need to take time off to care for themselves or a loved one, or welcome a new child.

This legislation helps keep our state economically competitive, provides a support system for individuals and families, and brings Connecticut into line with other states in our region.

The AAUW notes that this legislation helps families across all generations. While it requires an initial investment, it becomes self-supporting and allows employees to pay into a fund that permits them to have paid leave from work when their family has a “crisis.” This “crisis” could be a sick child, dying parent, new baby, or other emergency that requires time away from work. Consider for a moment how it would feel to have a baby and face the need to return to work after only a week or two – before you are healed and before you have had a chance to really bond with your child. Or suppose your son is ill with leukemia or that your mother is dying. Wouldn’t you want the time away from work to spend with them?

You may think that because there is the federal Family Medical Leave Act that this legislation is unnecessary. However, most workers are either ineligible for FMLA or cannot afford to take the *unpaid leave* provided by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act.

In fact, only 17 percent of workers - including just six percent of low-wage workers who need this legislation the most - have access to paid leave through their employer.

Your approval of this legislation would bring Connecticut into line with Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey, which have passed and implemented successful paid leave programs. Massachusetts passed paid leave in July 2018. Similar legislation is also pending in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. It is time for Connecticut to enact this legislation.

Passage of this legislation will help our state remain competitive in our region and attract and retain workers in Connecticut.

It is also important to note than the lack of paid leave disproportionately impacts workers of color, many of whom are in low-wage jobs that don't provide paid leave. These workers have few resources to fall back on and cannot afford to lose their jobs because they need some time away from work. Paid family leave is especially important to Black women, who face much higher rates of maternal mortality and pregnancy complications. Most day care operations will not take newborn until they are at least eight weeks old. Yet many new mothers must either return to work or lose their jobs.

Paid leave benefits Connecticut's economy and businesses. It means workers will not fall behind on their bills and medical expenses and are less likely to file for bankruptcy, which negatively impacts the economy.

Paid leave improves worker retention and saves employers' expensive turnover costs. After more than 10 years of paid leave in California, employers overwhelmingly report positive or neutral impact on their business.

Thank you for your service to our state and for your attention to this testimony. The AAUW urges the committee and members of the General Assembly to support S.B. 1 and H.B. 5003. It is important for our economic future and for support of working families in our state.

Sincerely,

Karen A. Grava
President, Connecticut Chapter
American Association of University Women