

Anderson, Bryan

From: Callie Heilmann <callie.heilmann@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 12, 2019 3:18 PM
To: LABTestimony; Maddie Granato
Subject: Testimony In Support of S.B.1 & H.B. 5003
Attachments: FMLC Op-Ed_2019.docx

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

My name is Callie Gale Heilmann and I live in Bridgeport, 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 Program.

When we discuss making Connecticut more competitive, implementing paid family leave should be at the top on the list. As a small business entrepreneur, I believe that the Family Medical Leave Compensation (FMLC) program is one key element for attracting and nurturing diverse, innovative start-ups and small businesses here in our state.

The FMLC would be a state-administered program run by the Labor Department, similar to Social Security or a state-run health insurance plan. All workers in Connecticut would pay 0.5% of their wages each week into a collective fund, from which they are eligible to take up to 12 weeks of leave per year, collecting up to \$1,000 per week in wages. Data collected from New Jersey and Rhode Island shows that on average, 7.5% of all employees took an average of 6.7 weeks of leave for medical or family care. 18% of those leaves were pregnancy medical leave, which we can all agree is something every employer should be able to offer her employees!

I want to build a supportive, nurturing environment for all employees and the FMLC program offers me maximum flexibility and competitiveness. In hiring negotiations, I can tell potential employees that the FMLC program is available, thus establishing a workplace culture that centers health and happiness. Then, if and when my employees take it, the FMLC program also frees up their wages so I can hire a temporary worker or choose to reinvest in my business during their absence.

Large pro-business organizations have expressed their opposition to the bill. However, large employers and their powerful business lobby are majority white, male-owned and operated. They do not speak for the diverse voices of small employers, start-ups, and women and black-owned businesses in our small state, who currently feel the immediate and lasting impact of family caregiving and health emergencies on our bottom lines. We all know that women bear the brunt of caregiving roles in our family systems, resulting in a large gender earnings gap. We also need to address that generational systemic and structural racism greatly effects our small businesses and workers of color, who deal with familial health emergencies at much higher rates than their white peers. The FMLC program is one important tool for building gender and racial equity in our workplaces.

By 2025, millennials will make up 75% of the nation's workforce. According to [a recent article in the New York Times](#), "people born after 1996... are far more open to social change than older generations have been." Like Social Security did almost a century ago, paid family leave is a state-administered program that addresses the true needs of workers of all economic classes, ethnicities, and gender identifications in our state. Given that Connecticut is now entirely surrounded by states that offer paid leave programs, we are already several years behind the curve in incubating our next generation of successful, innovative business leaders.

Elected officials need to be honest about who is most impacted by that lack of a paid family leave program. It is not the corporate executives or CEOs of companies. Rather, it is the hourly employees at national retail chains, health aide workers, our bus drivers, etc. And it is the small business owners like me. If we truly believe that our leadership today is about building for the next seven generations, then we are obligated to do this. Our future generations will thank us!

Callie Gale Heilmann is a partner at Hartford Prints!, a stationery and urban goods store in Hartford. She is also the founder and President of Bridgeport Generation Now, a social action network that works to increase civic engagement in Bridgeport, CT.

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