



**Testimony of the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors and the  
Commission on Equity and Opportunity Submitted to the Labor and Public  
Employees Committee February 14, 2019**

**RE: S.B. 1; H.B. 5003, Acts Related to Paid Family and Medical Leave**

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, Ranking and other distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors (CWCS) on the above referenced bills.

My name is Steven Hernández, Executive Director of the Commissions on Women, Children & Seniors & Equity & Opportunity. I am joined by one of our graduate interns, Ms. Allissa Desloge, from the Yale School of Public Health.

Connecticut workers deserve the opportunity to take time off to care for themselves, a loved one, or to welcome a new child without having to worry about financial and/or job insecurity. Currently, just 17% of workers, including just 6% of low-wage workers, have access to paid leave through their employers. According to the Institute of Women's Policy Research (IWPR), the passage of this legislation would allow 68,000 workers to benefit from this program per year.

Connecticut is one of the few states in New England that has yet to pass paid leave legislation. Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts have all passed paid leave and Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine are considering similar legislation. Connecticut needs to follow suit in order to attract and retain workers. National surveys show that the majority of workers, especially Millennials, support mandatory paid family leave and intentionally seek it as a work benefit. Nearly 25% of adult caregivers are between the ages of 18 and 34, so many in



this generation are tasked with caring for themselves, their own children, and their adult loved ones while still maintaining a job.

In addition to benefiting Connecticut workers, a paid family and medical leave program would benefit Connecticut's economy as a whole by preventing workers from falling behind on bills and medical expenses which could lead them to file bankruptcy. This program would also benefit businesses by improving worker retention. It is important to note that this program would be entirely employee funded and administered by the state Department of Labor—meaning employers will not be funding the program or burdened by the administrative claims.

Workers of color, who are overrepresented in low-wage jobs, are disproportionately impacted by a lack of paid leave. These individuals have fewer resources to absorb the financial impact of family or personal medical issues due to the racial wealth and wage gaps. It is critical that we expand paid family and medical leave to these individuals, particularly African American women, who face much higher rates of maternal mortality and complications from pregnancy. One of the underlying causes of maternal mortality is stress. Psychosocial stress triggers physiological responses that create a weathering effect on our bodies that puts us at risk for premature development of chronic disease, and in relation to pregnancy, adverse birth outcomes.

Stress is experienced by many individuals who have to care for themselves and their loved ones without the security of being able to afford taking leave from their jobs. For individuals who are pregnant or are experiencing a health condition, stress only exacerbates physical wear and tear on the body, making both physical and mental health worse off. In addition, workers without paid leave are more likely to not give their bodies' adequate time to recover from a health



condition, due to a financial need to return to work. This could lead to worse health complications down the road and reduce worker productivity. The IWPR projects that approximately 60% of claims would be for the worker's own serious health condition and 30% for pregnancy, childbirth, and bonding, so it is essential that we provide these individuals with the adequate paid time off so they can return to work when they are physically and mentally ready.

CWCS/CEO supports efforts to create a paid family medical leave program in Connecticut. Thank you for your attention, and we look forward to working with you on these and other worker and workforce supports.