



***In Support of SB 1 and HB 5003 (RAISED), AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE and AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A PAID FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE PROGRAM***

Good morning Chairs Kushner and Porter, and members of the Committee, my name is Azzad Ishmael and I am here to voice my support for paid family and medical leave.

I am a recently retired member of SEIU 1199NE, and a current Executive Board member. I worked for 38 years at the Chelsea Place Care Center in the building maintenance department. On Valentine's Day five years ago, I went to the doctor after experiencing tightness in my chest and was told I had quadruple blockage in my heart and would need a lengthy open heart surgery.

I returned to the hospital a few days later and underwent a six hour open heart surgery, in which at least one of my ribs was fractured. After my surgery I could not return to work, in fact my doctor cautioned me to prepare for a lengthy recovery. Luckily for me I had accrued some paid vacation and sick time up until this point, and was able to use this to cover approximately a month and a half of my recovery, however, my recovery took much longer than that.

In addition to the limited paid leave I had saved up, I was also able to access a limited amount of short term disability, although this program accounted for less than 50% of my salary at the time, so my monthly income was effectively cut in half.

During my recovery my wife was forced to use what little vacation time she had accrued in order to be home and take care of me. Additionally, my wife quit her part time job because they would not allow her to miss an extended period of time.

Throughout this time my family experienced extreme strain. Like most people we had a mortgage, student loans, utilities, credit cards, and daily life expenses to pay for. Though my wife hadn't told me at the time, she often had to resort to begging financial institutions to grant us a stay on paying our bills and more than once felt as though she was going to have a breakdown. We kept all of this from our daughter at the time in hopes of sparing her the anguish.

It was at my three month doctor's appointment that I found out that I had lost my insurance. Apparently after three months without working I had become ineligible for the insurance my job had supplied. My wife had been on my insurance as well, so at that point neither of us were covered. This only added to the strain, increasing my desire to return to work even though I was not fully recovered.

Finally, my sixth month checkup came. On my way to this appointment all I could think about was how I needed the doctor to approve me to go back to work because we badly needed the money.

Furthermore, every day I did not work was another day my wife and I went uninsured. I knew I was not fully recovered but we were desperate.

After speaking with my doctor, he hesitantly approved me to return to work, although he warned that if I strained myself too much I risked reopening my chest and my heart exploding. Even after I returned to work it took my wife and I several months to catch up on our bills and to regain insurance coverage.

Had there been a paid family medical leave program in Connecticut at this time, my wife and I would have been able to continue paying our bills while we were both out of work. This program would have given my wife the peace of mind she needed during this time and protected her employment while she cared for me. Though the experience my wife and I had was horrible, there are many people in Connecticut who do not have the same safety nets that we did. Not everyone has a job that grants vacation time, not everyone has a loved one that can afford to stay home with them, and not every financial institution are as lenient as the ones we dealt with.

Please pass paid family medical leave now. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.