

32BJ



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INTERNATIONAL UNION
CTW, CLC

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Testimony Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

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

February 14, 2019

Anna Karwowski

Good afternoon, members of the committee. Thank you for hearing my testimony. My name is Anna Karwowski. I live in New Britain and I work as a building cleaner in Farmington. I am here for myself and other members of my union, 32BJ SEIU, to ask you to support S.B.1 and H.B. 5003 and pass a system of paid family and medical leave for Connecticut working people.

I came here from Poland when I was 18 years old seeking a better life. I am proud of all that I have been able to accomplish in this great democracy – my family, my job, my volunteer work with my union. But many Americans don't realize how much more support other democracies offer, especially countries in the European Union. In Poland, women are given a generous amount of fully paid maternity leave. In America, I struggled financially when I had my two sons.

I remember when my second son Jacob was born fifteen years ago. Back then, my husband and I decided I should take six weeks off work, which still was not enough time to care for a baby. To do that, he had to work extra hours at his construction job, spending 60, sometimes even 80-hours a week at work so I could be home with the baby. One parent shouldn't have to sacrifice all of that time with their newborn.

Paid Family Leave is not only important for new moms, but also for people dealing with their own or family sicknesses. When my mom had her triple bypass surgery she was out of work for two months. She was receiving about a quarter of her regular pay a week, which was helpful but not enough to survive. She had to draw from her retirement savings account to pay for her mortgage and other bills.

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The 4,500 members of 32BJ in Connecticut are security officers and cleaners like me. We are proud of the job we do, and proud of the pay and benefits we have won with our union. But our income is modest. Many of us know how difficult it is to take 12 weeks without pay to care for a new baby, or for a seriously ill family member. That's why many of us, including me, worked very hard this past election to help legislators win who understand the needs of working people.

As you know, workers in the states surrounding Connecticut now enjoy paid family leave. After voters spoke in the last election, it's time for Connecticut to join them. So I am proud to ask you this afternoon to please support S.B. 1 and H.B. 5003 for myself, for my union brothers and sisters, and for all working families in Connecticut. Thank you.