

**TESTIMONY OF JESSICA LABRENCIS 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**

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

My name is Jessica Labrencis. I am a resident of West Hartford and I appreciate the opportunity to testify 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. Thank you, Representative Gilchrest for this opportunity.

Although I was born and raised in Connecticut, I lived in California for eight years while my husband served in the Navy. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in California's paid family and medical leave system after my son, Graham, was born in 2013. While I was pregnant, I was a lawyer at a small law firm that was not covered under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act because it employed fewer than 50 people. Even if my firm had been covered by the FMLA, I would have only had been entitled to take up to twelve weeks of *unpaid* leave after the birth of my son. As a new attorney at a small law firm with a spouse who was an enlisted sailor, it would have been financially difficult, if not impossible, for me to take eight or twelve weeks of unpaid time off after my son was born. The financial stress of taking unpaid leave likely would have overshadowed the first few months of my newborn baby's life, and I would not have been able to fully recover physically and emotionally from childbirth before returning to work.

Fortunately for my family, I was able to take advantage of California's paid family and medical leave system. In California, workers pay into the state's disability insurance system and are able to take up to twelve weeks off after the birth of a child while receiving partial wage replacement. The paid family and medical leave system is open to most employees regardless of

how many people are employed by a given company or how much they earn. California's system also provides workers with job protections while they are out on leave.

After my son was born, my doctor and I completed some simple paperwork, and shortly thereafter, I began receiving weekly payments which partially replaced my earnings for twelve weeks. During that twelve-week time period, I was able to recover physically and emotionally from childbirth. I was also able to focus on caring for and bonding with my new baby, and I believe that having twelve weeks off from work was crucial in establishing a strong breastfeeding routine with him. It was very important to me to return to my job after my son was born, so after taking off those twelve weeks, I did ultimately return to work. Thanks to California's paid family and medical leave system, my son's first twelve weeks of life were not overshadowed by financial stress.

Since becoming a parent and moving back to Connecticut, I have supported the paid family and medical leave bills that have been proposed in the past several sessions. Over the past few years, I have seen people in my life experience the hardships that are associated with being out of work due to serious medical issues. I have found myself contributing to GoFundMe fundraisers for acquaintances to help them stay afloat while they are out of work dealing with medical crises. I strongly believe Connecticut should be the next state to implement a formal paid family and medical leave system to provide a safety net to all Connecticut residents who are experiencing serious medical issues or bringing home new babies.

I urge the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to pass S.B. 1 and H.B. 5003 so that Connecticut workers can maintain financial stability after the birth of their children and when dealing with serious health issues. Thank you.