



Connecticut

Testimony of Jennifer Mace Walton in **SUPPORT** of
SB 1 An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave and
HB 5003 An Act Implementing
Labor and Public Employees Committee, February 14, 2019

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and members of the Labor Committee: My name is Jennifer Mace Walton, and I am an AARP volunteer and family caregiver from Ansonia, Connecticut. I am here to support SB 1 and HB 5003, which will provide financial and job security to family caregivers as they care for their loved ones.

In January of 2018, I left my job at Make-A-Wish Colorado to move back to Connecticut where I was born and raised (go UCONN!). I made the decision to move back to Connecticut as my mother had a stroke in October 2015 and my dad had his latest heart attack in May 2016. My dad had his first stroke when I was 15 years old and has had subsequent strokes, transient ischemic attacks (TIAs), and a heart attack. Dad's health was continuing to decline due to Congestive Heart Failure, Stage 3 Chronic Kidney Disease, and COPD to name a few of his ailments.

Prior to last year, each time my parents had a major health crisis, I hopped on a plane and stayed in Connecticut for weeks to try to help as much as possible. I would always return to Colorado and go back to my job and always felt guilty in doing so. My parents could not relocate to Colorado due to my father's heart condition in particular (the altitude is not good for it) as well as the fact that they are generational to the valley and have known no other home.

This past year my father began having more health issues and he was diagnosed with colon cancer. Due to my mother's stroke she continues to suffer from short term memory loss and needs additional support - especially as we entered a world of the unknown with dad's latest diagnosis.

I packed up my car and drove to Connecticut and moved back into my childhood home. My husband has stayed behind in Denver where he has a steady job and is most importantly able to provide me with health insurance. Due to my father's extreme schedule of continuous doctor's appointments and the need for my immediate assistance, I have been unable to get a job. My father has been hospitalized six times in this past year and also had major surgery to remove his cancer. It continues to be a long recovery process.

This journey has had a very emotional and physical impact on us all. We have had to readjust to living together and to remember that I am now an adult - no longer a child (this has had its own set of challenges). Since I have been unable to work, it has been a financial struggle as well. I have a personal budget of \$25 a week for food and gas, which is a definite change from the position I held as a director in my last job. While it would be ideal to have my own space and to have my husband here with me, I am where I need to be right now. My mother constantly falls asleep from pure exhaustion and sometimes gets confused

about all of my dad's medications (up to 20 pills a day). She too has medications she needs to take and sometimes forgets to take those as well. I assist in coordinating the many medications, breathing treatments and nighttime oxygen as well as keeping the schedule of appointments with doctors, physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, iron infusions, INR counts and blood draws. We see a primary care doctor, cardiologist, urologist, nephrologist, pulmonologist, GI doc, oncologist, and others. It is a full-time, unpaid position.

At the end of the day I will not have regrets in knowing I have done everything I can, but being a caregiver is the most challenging position I have ever held. This is why I am asking you to make Connecticut the next state to provide paid family and medical leave. I know that the program under consideration would not apply to my particular situation because of the amount of time I have had to take off of work (and because I was working in another state), but I wanted to share my experience on behalf of the many, many family caregivers who have no choice but to juggle employment and caregiving duties. 60% of caregivers are employed, and a majority of those who are employed work full-time hours. They do everything they can to be good employees while also taking care of the people they love. For those caregivers who, unlike me, are unable to leave their jobs and be fully dedicated to taking care of their loved ones, paid family leave would provide job protection, a bit of flexibility, and financial security at a difficult time.

Thank you for your consideration.