

Testimony of Rick Melita
Before the Labor and Public Employees Committee
February 14 , 2019

Members of the Labor Committee, my name is Rick Melita and I am the Director of the Connecticut State Council of the Service Employees International Union. SEIU represents over 60,000 members in Connecticut, and I am here today to urge passage of Senate Bill 1 AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE and House Bill 5003, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A PAID FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE PROGRAM.

These bills would establish a system of allowing workers to take time off to deal with the most difficult aspects of their personal lives to care for a family member without worrying that they might lose their job or suffer economic hardships. It would be funded by the worker through payroll deduction.

Over the years, Unions have fought for fairness for workers- whether through higher wages, health care, health and safety regulations, retirement benefits, vacation, and sick leave- to weave a safety net for all of us. As safety nets go, it is quite frankly, not that strong, due to successful attempts by wealthy financial interests to maximize their profits no matter what he costs to the individual work or society as a whole.

The measures before you today would strengthen that frayed safety net by giving workers, primarily low wage workers, some comfort, peace of mind and economic stability that this program would offer.

Recently I lost a close family member. She had complex medical needs that required numerous care giving trips to doctors and hospitals and nursing homes. I am sure in other testimony you will hear other stories of loss, that my story is not unusual. We all have those situations in our lives where our work life have to take a back seat to needs of our families. I was fortunate enough to have a job that has a compassionate policy and allowed me the flexibility to attend to her needs.

Unfortunately we are living in an era of late stage capitalism, where the needs of the corporation and owners of capital trump basic human needs to care for a family member. We see the effects of that grinding economic system- with historic income inequality, scapegoating, and even shorter life expectancies- all around us.

This modest proposal will be denounced as bad for business, just as all the other social programs to protect workers have been denounced as bad for business. I won't deny that this program places additional requirements on business owners to be a little more flexible to be a little more humane, to be understanding, to care a little bit more about their workers.

I think that is a small trade off to make our state a better place to work and live. Thank you.