



Connecticut Working Families Party
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Testimony from Carlos Moreno, state director of the Working Families Organization of Connecticut.

Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and the members of the Labor Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing today and for giving us the opportunity to speak **IN FAVOR of SB1 and HB5003 for a Paid Family and Medical Leave Program**. Working Families is a growing progressive political organization that fights for an economy that works for all of us, and a democracy in which every voice matters. We believe that our children's life chances must not be determined at birth, and that America must be a nation that allows all its people to thrive.

For years, the Working Families Organization, like many supportive advocates, have delivered ample, research-based testimony substantiating the need for a paid family and medical leave program from various perspectives, including support from the small business community. It's clear: even opponents of paid leave agree that it is time to pass it here in CT¹.

Today, I'd like to forget about all the studies and data explaining why paid leave makes sound economic sense for our state. Instead, I'd like to explain why I believe so strongly that paid leave can change lives. It did for me.

A little over six years ago, my wife, Courtney and I welcomed our first baby, Montana. My wife didn't have access to paid leave or qualify for coverage under the 1993 Family Medical Leave Act, which leaves out approximately 41% of America's workforce². In Connecticut, 59% of its workforce doesn't qualify³. Although it was landmark piece of legislation for its time, for too many Americans, like us, taking leave without pay was too unrealistic. To make matters more difficult, I was in the process of switching jobs during my wife's

¹<https://www.courant.com/opinion/op-ed/hc-op-republicans-legislative-priorities-0108-20190108-qmzebustfzazzcqlpcws4ccki-story.html>

² <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/fmla/guide-to-fmla.pdf>

³ <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/paid-leave-means-a-stronger-connecticut.pdf>

pregnancy, so I couldn't even qualify for FMLA upon taking a new job, which, in effect, amounts to a penalty for trying to advance your own career.

As I was planning a transition to a new job, I considered purchasing a short term disability plan, but quickly found that there were no accessible or affordable plans that provided the level of comprehensive coverage that met the needs of my family. I found that STDI plans were generally not worth it; they were too expensive, the coverage periods were too short, and only covered between 50% and 80% of income. Purchasing a plan was not feasible for us.

Fortunately, I found a job with a new employer, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, which actually provided paid family and medical leave to its employees, a program I never had access to earlier in my career working for private companies.

Without paid leave, I could not have afforded to take any time off of work. We would have gone broke, quite honestly. My wife had a difficult pregnancy requiring a higher level of care, we were struggling to keep up with bills, and there was a lot of uncertainty about our future. But the paid time off that I was able to take helped keep us financially stable, freeing me to become a better partner to my wife, helping me bond with my newborn daughter (an experience I will cherish forever), and brought us closer together as a family. And it helped keep my career on track and moving forward.

I was fortunate. Many fathers are not. Most fathers have to cobble together vacation time or sick days when their children are born, or forgo taking leave entirely to avoid losing income. And for workplaces that do offer some form of paid leave, the stigma associated with fathers taking leave can backtrack a career. A recent Deloitte survey showed that one in three male respondents said they worried that taking time off to tend to a newborn would jeopardize their careers, and more than half of the men said they felt using parental-leave benefits available to them would be seen as a lack of commitment to their jobs⁴.

For a person like me, trying to advance my career at the same time as starting a new family would have been impossible without paid leave. As committed paid leave advocates, Planned Parenthood strongly encouraged that new fathers take time off for the birth of a child. But that's not the case for most of our workforce; And for workers who do have access to paid leave - generally more affluent, higher income workers who don't need it - plans are uneven for women and men, if men have any access at all.

And that's the problem. Providing a paid family and medical leave insurance program should NOT be left up to the generosity of an employer to determine which employees deserve it, and/or the level of coverage they deserve. If you're a person of color, a low income earner, or a member of the working poor, it's pretty certain you won't ever have access to paid leave through an employer⁵. Frankly, the private market has failed to provide a comprehensive paid leave program, especially one that equitably distributes earned benefits⁶.

⁴<https://www.wsj.com/articles/as-more-new-dads-get-paternity-leave-companies-push-them-to-take-it-1531301401>

⁵<http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/release/8-30-17.cfm>

That is why it is critical that a real and comprehensive paid leave program in Connecticut is publicly administered, rooted in equity, and prioritizes the needs of middle class and working poor residents, especially communities of color, who are most impacted by our state's income inequality crisis⁷.

To that end, Working Families through its strong partnership with the Campaign for Paid Leave recommends comprehensive legislation that includes job protection, high wage replacement and is portable for all workers, expands on FMLA's definition of family to include chosen family, and covers family and medical leave.

It's time to give the majority of Connecticut's workforce a better chance at achieving financial security and prosperity. That's exactly what paid leave did for me. It was there for me when my family needed it. If we truly believe that working families are central to our economic growth, then passing paid leave is a critical step in that direction.

Thank you for holding this hearing and considering this important legislation.

⁷ <https://ctmirror.org/2018/12/18/wealth-inequality-solutions/>

