



**Testimony Supporting
SB 1, An Act Concerning Paid Family & Medical Leave
HB 5003, An Act Implementing a Paid Family Medical Leave Program**

**Labor & Public Employees Committee
February 14, 2019**

Good afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and members of the Committee. The Women's Center of Greater Danbury provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in 13 towns in the Greater Danbury area including Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Roxbury, Sherman, and Washington. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, coordination with local law enforcement, and prevention education and training, among others. We are a community-based member center of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence.

We urge your support of SB 1 and HB 5003, which will create and implement a comprehensive, statewide, self-funded system of paid family and medical leave for workers needing to take time off to care for themselves or a loved one. **Time to care of oneself or one's family is an essential component to healing after surviving domestic violence and sexual assault.** Workers should be empowered to take that time without the additional worry about the security of their jobs or paying their bills.

Despite research showing that the benefits of a paid family leave system include a stronger work force, positive changes in wages, and lower use of public assistance, the U.S. is one of few developed countries without such a system. The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) simply does not work for many families. FMLA only provides for UNPAID leave and is only required of companies with 50 or more employees. Most workers who are eligible for this type of leave don't use it because they can't afford to lose pay. Only 17% of workers in the U.S., including just 6% of low wage workers, have access to paid leave through their employer.

For survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, SB 1 and HB 5003 would provide a meaningful source of support. Both proposals would allow a survivor to take time off to address the many serious physical and mental health conditions that result from abuse and assault while still getting paid and able to support their family. This can be particularly important for survivors who have chosen to leave their abusive partner and now may be the sole earner supporting their children. Stable wages are critical for enabling survivors to obtain life's basic needs, which is critical during a time of healing and recovery after experiencing trauma.

Also critical for many survivors is the provision under both bills that allows family members to access paid leave to care for the survivor while she or he is obtaining treatment for and recovering from a serious health condition. The physical and mental toll of domestic violence and sexual assault cannot be

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overstated and the support of a loved one when dealing with the aftermath can strengthen outcomes and stability for survivors and their children.

Connecticut does have explicit employment leave for victims of family violence (CGS § 31-51ss); however, it is not required that it be paid and it is limited to 12 days per calendar year. This time may not be sufficient for an employee to address her or his own serious health condition resulting from domestic violence and sexual assault. Additionally, the existing law does not include any provision that would allow a family member leave time to care for the survivor.

Connecticut is a leader on family-friendly workplace policies, but when it comes to paid family and medical leave, we are trailing behind many of our neighbors. Connecticut is now surrounded by states that have passed paid leave including Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. Similar legislation is pending in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. Connecticut must adopt paid leave to stay competitive in our region and attract and retain skilled workers.

Paid leave will benefit Connecticut's economy and businesses. Without paid leave, workers fall behind on bills and medical expenses, and are more likely to file for bankruptcy, which negatively impacts the economy. Further, when workers don't have access to paid leave, they are more likely to ultimately need to leave that place of employment. Paid leave improves worker retention and saves employers' expensive turnover costs. After 10 years of paid leave in California, employers overwhelmingly report positive or neutral impact on their businesses and employees report increased morale and productivity. It's time for Connecticut to adopt a paid family and medical leave system. We urge your support of SB 1 and HB 5003. Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

Sincerely,

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