

Testimony of Kit Salazar-Smith
CT General Assembly
February 14, 2019

IN SUPPORT OF: SB1: An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave and House Bill 5003: An Act Implementing a Paid Family and Medical Leave Program.

My name is Kit Salazar-Smith and I live in Waterbury. I stand in support of Senate Bill 1 and House Bill 5003. Having had Paid Family and Medical Leave myself at most of the time during 35 years of employment in Connecticut, I realized just how fortunate I was when I witnessed the struggle of family and neighbors who did not have such an advantage.

In a practical sense, without Paid Family and Medical Leave, employees will send children to school sick or go to work sick themselves, spreading the wealth of their illness, so others around them become sick and need to miss school or work. Many years ago, I would meet with a group of concerned community activists, some teachers, some preachers, some of us just ordinary Connecticut citizens also with a group called Naugatuck Valley Project, trying to find ways to work for and push for Paid Family and Medical Leave.

This came about after a discussion some of us had about neighbors, family members and students, who's families were left in financial turmoil due to illness in a family: losing time at work because of a sick child or being sick oneself, meant short paychecks, meaning electric bills not paid, so no power for cooking meals, no lights to do homework. Food had to be rationed in order to pay rent or mortgages so kids went to school hungry and hungry children can't fully concentrate on school lessons. Medical needs too were neglected, so no money for medicine if you needed the money to pay a heating bill that month. Proper clothing could not be provided so families especially children didn't have access to warm seasonal clothing.

To help as best they can in trying to avoid disaster, families without Paid Family and Medical Leave may end up in outrageous credit card debt or have to rely on some type of public assistance (so in a sense most of us are paying for it anyway). On the other hand, studies show that having Paid Family Leave, employees are more productive and loyal because they feel valued and employers in turn find value in retaining those employees for the expertise and experience they have within the company. Training people cost more than retaining a good, loyal expert employee.

Families in our communities who have Paid Family and Medical Leave are more financially solvent. They can maintain their support and financial contributions to communities and support local businesses - because they have the money and therefore, cash flows throughout the business community. These days, not many families can go for any length of time without income coming in!

Hard to understand, but the United States is one of the only countries that calls itself a leader, yet doesn't have nation-wide Paid Family Leave; 41 countries are ahead of us in this, from Estonia with 87 weeks, to countries such as Mongolia with 17 weeks and Sweden with 16 weeks. And an additional, 38 other countries stand tall in front of us! No reflection on those countries, but since

when did we allow ourselves to come second to Estonia or Mongolia in caring for our families who struggle to choose between eating every day and keeping their lights on?! And here in our own country, I believe that, surrounding states, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New York now have Paid Family Leave.

There is sometimes hidden, but very real suffering in communities here in Connecticut. Maybe you aren't aware, because in our own daily hustle and bustle of life we can miss the signs of a child sitting in a class room sleepy because hunger can do that to people. We may not see a mom who has to take her children to the local soup kitchen, or the dad whose paycheck doesn't cover needs because his wife was in the hospital and someone had to stay home with the children and his pride won't let him show you that he can't keep his family in clothes that fit and keep them warm because along with a loss of income due to illness or injury, they don't want to lose what pride they have left. These families through circumstances beyond their control are not given the Paid Family and Medical Leave that's available in places like Latvia, Croatia, or even Romania!

Come on Connecticut! Surely we can do better for our families, friends, neighbors, better for our communities, which in turn is better for ourselves!

Thank you for your time,
Kit Salazar-Smith