



**The Center for
Family Justice**

Testimony Supporting

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

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Labor & Public Employees Committee February 14, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and members of the Committee. The Center for Family Justice provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Bridgeport, Fairfield, Stratford, Trumbull, Monroe and Easton. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

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.

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, 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 while still getting paid and able to support their family. This can be particularly important for survivors who have chosen to leave and now may be the sole earner supporting their children.

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 cannot be 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 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.

Implementing true paid leave is an essential component of supporting economic and racial justice in our state. Lack of paid leave disproportionately impacts workers of color,



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who are overrepresented in low-wage jobs that do not provide paid leave and, due to racial wealth and wage gaps, have fewer resources to absorb the financial impact of a family or personal medical issue. According the Centers for Disease Control, women of color (American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, and Multi-racial) experience the highest rates of intimate partner violence when compared to other races and ethnicities (NISVS: 2010 – 2012 State Report, CDC). Access to paid leave would significantly improve outcomes for these survivors.

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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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Serving Bridgeport, Fairfield, Stratford, Trumbull, Monroe, and Easton.

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