

Dear Members of Labor and Public Employees Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Kristianna Smith and I live in New Britain, Connecticut. I stand in support of S.B. 1: An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave and H.B. 5003: An Act Implementing a Paid Family and Medical Leave Program.

In September of 2017, my husband, a therapist, decided that to round out his life he would like to begin Muay Thai Kickboxing. That endeavor resulted in a knee surgery. That's not the story I want to tell you. In June of 2018, we welcomed our first child into the world. My husband had 6 weeks of partially paid leave which meant our bills were covered. During this time he made sure I ate and changed 97% of our newborns diapers. This is also not the story I want to tell you. I want you to have an idea of the type of man my husband is. A kickboxing therapist who loves his wife and daughter enough to change sticky poop diapers.

In November of 2018, I drove my husband to the walk in clinic. The clinic referred us to the ER. Then suddenly he was being admitted. No one could tell us what was wrong. What followed were 4 days of back and forth driving from hospital to home- caring for my 5 month old daughter while supporting my husband. I stayed up at night terrified I would get a call that he was no longer with us. And during all of this, my husband's greatest concern was that he wasn't working. You see, I am self employed and have cut back to care for our daughter. My husband had recently become self employed as well- meaning we had little savings. Luckily, my husband's condition was able to quickly return to work. But what if he couldn't?

2018 was my wake up call. A surgery, a birth, and an emergency hospital visit proving that our lives are short and our time with our loved ones precious. My husband and I promised to be there come rain or come shine and I find it inhumane that I might have to abandon him at his hospital bed to ensure we have the rent. That there are parents who do not have the option of arguing over who changes diapers because they are both at work- putting food on the table. But without paid family and medical leave, these are options that my family and thousands like us have to choose between.

I should not have to be wealthy to spend time an ailing parent. Maternity leave should not be a right only for middle-class workers. But if you fail to pass this bill, that is what you are telling the citizens of Connecticut. That to care for our spouse, our child, or our loved in their most vulnerable hour is only a privilege granted to those of higher stature, which in our state translates to predominantly white families.

I believe that the role of government is to do collectively what we cannot accomplish individually, but in the case of Paid Family and Medical Leave I believe that you are returning a right that has been taken away. The right to care for our loved ones no matter our wealth, position, or power.

I strongly support S.B. 1. I hope the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers will vote favorably this year to make paid family and medical leave a reality for all Connecticut workers.

Thank you for your time.

Kristianna Smith