

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

My name is Katherine Villeda and I live in Stamford, Connecticut. I am a leader and facilitator for CT Students for a Dream, and an advocate at a women's health center. 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 Medical Leave Program.

Growing up in a mixed-status, low-income family, taking unpaid time off was not an option, unless it was after my mother had given birth, and even then she always returned to work earlier than she should have. More recently, when my sister gave birth last year, I missed the first 10 days of my final semester to stay home and help her care for their children because my brother-in-law had to go back to work the day after she had given birth. My sister did not have paid maternity leave, so they knew that they would not have been able to survive if they both took unpaid leave. Had paid family and medical leave been available, my sister and her husband would have had the opportunity to have spend the much needed and deserved time together with their newborn. It saddens me that the lack of tangible safety nets robbed them, and many others, of such an important milestone in their lives.

Furthermore, I fully support the inclusive definition of family in the legislation, as a sibling who had to help care for a sibling. The social norm of the "nuclear family" is outdated. It takes a village to care for one another and oftentimes, we find ourselves taking care of or being taken care of by someone who may not be immediate family or blood related at all. Chosen family is as important as blood family for many people. For some, chosen family is the only family they have and they should not be excluded from paid family and medical leave because of those circumstances.

Paid leave is critical to economic and racial justice. Lack of paid leave disproportionately impacts workers of color, 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. Access to paid parental leave is critical to the health of Black women, who face much higher rates of maternal mortality and complications from pregnancy compared to white mothers. Connecticut has the ability to move in the right direction to reduce these disparities and move towards a more equitable state by passing this legislation.

I strongly support S.B. 1 and H.B. 5003. 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,
Katherine Villeda