



Testimony of Arvia Walker, MSW,  
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In support of Raised 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.

Good Afternoon Representative Porter, Senator Kushner and Members of Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Arvia Walker, Public Policy and Strategic Engagement Specialist at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying 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.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 60,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services. At Planned Parenthood our mission is to protect the fundamental right of all individuals to manage their own fertility and sexual health, and to ensure access to the services, education and information to realize that right.

My work at Planned Parenthood centers the experiences and lives of Black families and people across the state. We are working to ensure that every person who walks through our health center doors are able to achieve true reproductive freedom. Reproductive freedom means that every person will have the resources they need in order to live the lives that they choose, plan their families and raise their children free of barriers. Reproductive freedom means that every person has the right to live free of oppression. Reproductive oppression is the control and exploitation of individuals through our bodies, sexuality, labor, and reproduction<sup>1</sup>

The inability to take time off of work to take care of ourselves and our loved ones because of the real threat of losing your income and financial stability is an active act of reproductive oppression. No one should have to make that choice.

Our current system of FMLA is not working, a majority of people who have access to the program cannot afford to take the unpaid time off when needed. And as it stands, FMLA leaves so many of our communities out of the policy.

As advocates and decision makers we must center the people who are disproportionately impacted by intersecting systems of oppression. The effects of a lack of Paid leave for people of color in our country are compounded by the fact that people of color are overrepresented in low-wage jobs that make it nearly impossible to take unpaid time off.

As a campaign and organization we are urging you all to pass a comprehensive policy that is 1) publicly administered through Connecticut's Department of Labor (DOL) 2) Provides high wage replacement and job protection for all workers 3) Covers family and medical leave 4) Is portable to the employee and is based on earnings, not hours worked and last but not least 5) Expands FMLA's definition of family to include chosen family. It is important that paid leave laws and policies in Connecticut apply to all families. To do so, paid family medical leave should define family to ensure all workers can use their leave to care for those who are most important in their lives.

People like my papa. My papa is grandfather on my mother's side. He raised my mother and myself and has always been my own personal on-call superhero. He turned 75 yesterday and these last few years my family has been struggling to learn how to be in this new life with an aging and sick loved one. My papa is from the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.trustblackwomen.org/our-work/what-is-reproductive-justice/9-what-is-reproductive-justice>

rural south of Alabama. He was forced to dropout of school at in the 5th grade to help work to provide for himself and his family. He worked in the sugar cane fields of the south and then migrated to work the tobacco fields of the north, here in CT. My papa went on to work many low wage jobs, get his GED and then found himself doing manual labor at Pratt & Whitney. I don't have the time to tell his full story of how different systems impacted the only person I've know as my grandfather's health but flash forward to 2019, he has a liver condition, diabetes and other health issues that have brought him to near death more than a few time these last few years. What many people don't know is that my papa is not my biological grandfather, but he stepped in to care for my family more than 50 years ago and has been our caretaker. Now that it's time for me to do the same for him, I need a system where the term "family" is not defined by an immediate bloodline, marriage or any other restrictions. This is why it is critical to expand our definition of family in our Paid Family and Medical Leave policy.

As a country and state we know a lot about how to reduce disparities and at this point we have to make it a priority. Economic security is one of the main contributing factors to reducing health disparities along with other challenges communities are facing. Paid Family and Medical leave is a human rights issue, and one that will have a crucial impact on our state. I urge this Committee and Connecticut lawmakers to support S.B. 1 and H.B. 5003 this session to help Connecticut remain competitive, reduce our state's disparities and give working families in our state the support they deserve.