



***In Support of SB 1 and HB 5003 (RAISED), AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE and AN ACT IMPLEMENTING A PAID FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE PROGRAM***

Good morning Representatives and members of the Committee on Labor and Public Employees, my name is Karlene Whonder and I'm a Personal Care Attendant and member of SEIU, District 1199. I am here to testify in support of Paid Family Medical Leave. I've been a PCA for over 11 years. My consumer is schizophrenic and is wheelchair bound. She can't use her hands and without me she wouldn't take her medication. I help her live independently and try to support her to achieve creative pursuits so she can live a fulfilled life.

Because I value independent living so much, it pained me when prostate cancer struck my husband in 2015 and he was forced to depend on me for the most basic functions. He had surgery and couldn't work for weeks. I had to change the bed, help him take a bath, and help him get dressed. I don't drive, and after my husband's surgery he couldn't drive either. It was hard to get him to doctor's appointments or do the grocery shopping.

My husband had to take unpaid time off from his job and we were forced to live off my salary. My husband needed around-the-clock care so I took an unpaid leave from my former workplace at Job Core and we lived off of my evening job doing PCA work. It was very challenging to single-handedly support my husband, son, and 96-year-old mother-in-law on my weekly PCA salary of \$228.75. It was so hard to leave my husband in the evening to go to work while I was so worried about him. I didn't want him to see how stressed I was because I wanted him to be strong.

One of the most challenging aspects of my husband's illness was that he developed incontinence. It was so hard to live off my wages that he had to return to work prematurely, even though he was still incontinent. He was a school math tutor with children who sometimes exhibited behavioral challenges. If he spoke loudly, his lower abdomen would hurt and he would urinate. It was devastating to his sense of self. It was devastating to me too.

Because of his lack of a full recovery his muscles still aren't always tight enough to hold it in. When the weather is cold the accidents come back, and sometimes he can't tell when he needs to defecate. Even the other day, he had an accident while he was at work. He apologizes and says he's sorry for not being the man he's supposed to be. I tell him that we will get through this together.

If my husband had access to Paid Family Medical Leave his body would have been able to heal properly. Every working person should have access to Paid Family Medical Leave to be able to fully recuperate. Most importantly, it's about respect and dignity. Without this benefit, I worried about where the next meal would come from or if my husband would get better. I would go into the bathroom, turn on the shower, and pretend I was coughing so my family wouldn't hear me cry. No one else should go through this. I respectfully ask you to please pass Family Medical Leave for all families in Connecticut.