

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

My name is Carol J. Williams, Ph.D., and I am from Willimantic. I am testifying on behalf of the Women and Girls Fund Public Policy Taskforce of the Community Foundation of Eastern Connecticut which I Co-Chair. I stand in support of S.B.1 and H.B.6212: An Act Creating a Paid Family and Medical Leave System in the State.

S.B.1 and H.B.6212: An Act Creating a Paid Family and Medical Leave System in the State will create and implement a much needed comprehensive, statewide system of paid family and medical leave based upon an employee-paid insurance pool that workers can draw on in times of crisis when they need time off to care for themselves or a family member.

S.B.1/H.B.6212 is especially important for working women. Women are more likely to need paid family and medical leave because they bear children and they are more likely to be caretakers of seriously ill family members. Women are also more likely than men to work part-time with NO access to benefits, even if they work more than one part-time job.

I spent my career working with adult students at Eastern Connecticut State University. The majority of these students were female and were working either full-time or part-time. Most also had children and many were single parents. Over the years, I witnessed firsthand the strains placed on these families when faced with serious illness themselves or in their families. Often, having no access to paid family or medical leave, they had to quit their jobs and drop out of school to take care of ailing children, spouses or parents.

Financially strapped households in Eastern Connecticut (according to 24/7 Wall St.) are disproportionately comprised of single women with children, women of color and elderly women--25% of all children in Eastern CT live with a single mother. One in 10 households in Eastern CT is living below poverty level (according to 24/7 Wall St.); that includes 18% of women ages 18-34 (prime years for bearing children) and 6,200 girls. These families live "paycheck to paycheck" and are one crisis away from seeking public assistance which is much more expensive for the State.

Connecticut needs S.B. 1/H.B. 6212 because employers in Connecticut are increasingly relying on part-time workers. According to a report entitled "Status of Women in Eastern Connecticut" conducted by Data Haven for the Community Foundation of Eastern CT (full report available at [cfect.org/WGreport](http://cfect.org/WGreport)), in Eastern Connecticut, 78% of women ages 20-64 are in the workforce but only 55% of them are employed full time. It is estimated that half of all part-time workers need to hold two jobs to make ends meet. Most of these part-time employees, including those who work more than one part-time job and who may even work more than 40 hours a week, have NO benefits--not even access to the federal unpaid family and medical leave. S.B. 1/H.B.6212, since it is paid for by the workers themselves, will cover both full-time and part-time employees, thus providing a minimal safety net in times of family crisis.

Paid Family and Medical Leave will be a great help to help women who bear the biggest share of family caregiving for aging parents. In Eastern CT the senior (65+) population is expected to grow 44% by 2025. This means that more women may have to leave their jobs to deal with the needs of their parents. S.B. 1/H.B.6212 would give women the opportunity to take a leave of up to 12 weeks to handle immediate crises such as placement in a nursing or rehab facility while giving them the peace of mind to know that they could return to their job as soon as they were able. Meanwhile, their employer, not having to pay the person on leave, could hire a part-time person to handle essential tasks in their absence.

S.B. 1/H.B. 6212 will cost the State of Connecticut nothing but will bring tremendous benefits to low-wage women workers and their families. The labor of these workers, such as the lovely women who serve my morning coffee at McDonald's, contribute greatly to the quality of life for all of us in Connecticut. S.B. 1/H.B.6212, will provide low-wage women workers a financial cushion that will help them stay employed long term thereby improving their lives and the lives of their families.