

Labor and Public Employees Committee

Testimony prepared by Amy Miller

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HB 6553 An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Family Medical Leave Insurance

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My name is Amy Miller and I am the Program & Public Policy Director of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF). CWEALF is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives.

Throughout our history, CWEALF has advocated on behalf of federal and state family and medical leave laws. FMLA is important to ensure people can keep their jobs while they care for themselves or a family member. What FMLA does not do is provide paid time off, an essential element to ensure that families can continue to address immediate needs without devastating them economically. This current unpaid employment leave system disproportionately affects female employees. Women are responsible for family members therefore causing their families severe economic hardships during already stressful times. When employees take family and medical leave, they are left with one salary or no-salary in single-parent households. Employees that are covered and decide to take unpaid leave often suffer serious economic hardship as a result.

Therefore, I am submitting this testimony in support of HB 6553 An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Family Medical Leave Insurance, an important first step to addressing a significant barrier to Connecticut families.

HB 6553 requires that a Task Force of individuals from various fields and professions be appointed to serve on a Task Force by July 31, 2013. The Task Force will then meet to study how Connecticut can establish an insurance program to provide short-term benefits to workers who are unable to work due to pregnancy or the birth of a child; a non-work related illness or injury; or the need to care for a seriously ill child, spouse or parent. A report of the Task Force's findings and recommendations will be submitted by October 1, 2014 to the Labor Committee.

Connecticut has a history of trendsetting policies that support families. In 1990, three years before the Federal Government passed the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Connecticut passed a state FMLA. FMLA offers 12-16 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave, which workers can use to recover from an illness, to care for a new baby, or to care for a sick family member. Unfortunately many Connecticut workers are ineligible for or financially unable to utilize the benefits of the FMLA. Family Medical Leave Insurance (FMLI) is an employee paid insurance program that provides partial wage replacement making it a much more financially viable option for families.

Both businesses and employees benefit from FMLI. Workers who have access to paid leave after a child's birth tend to remain in the workforce, and rely less on public assistance and food stamp benefits. (Houser, 2012). If workers can draw benefits from a family and medical leave insurance program in lieu of some part of what the employer would otherwise provide, the employer enjoys a costs savings (Applebaum E. &, 2011). Furthermore, in the first comprehensive study of California's Family Leave Insurance program, the great majority of employers reported either cost savings or no additional costs associated with implementation because they temporarily assigned the work of employees on leave to other employees or hired temporary replacements (Houser, 2012). This is a program Connecticut families need. Therefore I urge you to pass HB 6553.