

Testimony Supporting

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

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Labor and Public Employees Committee

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Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak, and Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based public education and advocacy organization that works statewide to promote the well-being of Connecticut's children, youth, and families.

We support HB 6553, *An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study Family Medical Leave Insurance*, which establishes a task force to research how the state would implement an insurance program that provides short-term benefits to those who are temporarily out of 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.

Connecticut has a longstanding Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) which provides job protection during an illness, around pregnancy and the birth of a child, or during the illness of a family member. However, many workers are unable to take advantage of FMLA because they are not eligible, either working at firms too small to be covered or without sufficient employment tenure.¹

Additionally, even of those who are eligible, a large number cannot afford the lost pay from taking time off and therefore do not take any time off under FMLA or take very limited time off. And their families suffer while they do take leave. Of workers who took time off with reduced or no pay, 15% went on public assistance, 30% borrowed money, 36% put off paying bills, and 31% cut their leave short.² Thirty percent reported that making ends meet while on medical leave was "very difficult," and another 32% reported it was somewhat difficult.³ One in twenty workers reported needing to take leave in the last year but being unable to do so. When asked why they felt unable to take leave, nearly half (46%) said it was because they could not afford to do so.⁴

There are a number of complex questions that must be answered in developing a system for paid family medical leave insurance, including: (1) who pays into the system, (2) which workers are eligible to participate, (3) who operates the system, (4) the amount of payments workers may receive. We therefore support the creation of a task force to investigate these questions and issue recommendations for the structure and implementation of such a program.

¹ FMLA applies only to firms with 50 or more employees. Even if they work at an eligible employers, employees must have worked for the employer for 12 months and have worked 1,250 hours in the previous year. See, "FMLA Frequently Asked Questions," *United States Department of Labor*, available at: <http://www.dol.gov/whd/fmla/fmla-faqs.htm>

² Jacob Klerman, Kelly Daley, and Alyssa Pozniak, "Family and Medical Leave in 2012: Technical Report," *US Department of Labor*, (updated February 4, 2013), available at: <http://www.dol.gov/edgekey.net/asp/evaluation/fmla/FMLATechnicalReport.pdf>, 106

³ Ibid. at 107

⁴ Ibid. at 128