



Testimony of Catherine Taylor, AARP Rhode Island

In support of House Bill 7171

House Labor Committee

February 14, 2024

RE: House Bill 7171

Chairperson Corvese and Members of the House Labor Committee:

On behalf of AARP- RI and our over 125,000+ members in Rhode Island, I am pleased to express strong support for House Bill 7171, which would improve the TDI/TCI program by increasing the number of weeks a worker can use annually and expanding the definition of eligible care recipients.

Family caregivers want lawmakers to understand their lives, experience their everyday challenges and take action to support them. Family caregivers help their older parents, spouses and other loved ones with medications and medical care, meals, bathing and dressing, chores, paperwork and much more. Many do it all while also working full-or part-time. Some are on call 24/7, and often they can't take a break. They also spend an average of more than \$7,000 every year on caregiving expenses.

According to AARP Rhode Island's recent "Vital Voices" Survey of Rhode Islanders 45 and older, one in five of Rhode Island residents age 45+ are currently providing unpaid care to an adult relative or friend. The majority of respondents – 83% -- told us that providing care for a loved one is extremely or very important to them.

Family caregivers are the backbone of our system of long-term care. AARP's "Valuing the Invaluable" caregiving report highlights the critical contributions of family caregivers in our state. The report shows that there are an estimated 121,000 family caregivers in Rhode Island. These individuals provide 113 million hours of unpaid care on an annual basis. The estimated value of this care is 2.1 billion dollars a year. Without caregivers the demand on our already struggling long-term care providers would increase dramatically.

The third state in the nation to pass a paid family leave program, Rhode Island once led the way in providing security for workers and their families. However, as other states have adopted these programs the standards have been raised, Rhode Island's benefits now lag way behind in comparison. In fact, Rhode Island has the lowest wage replacement rate in the nation, making it nearly impossible for lower-wage workers to take time to care for a loved one and still pay the bills. This program needs to work for all Rhode Islanders, not just those who can afford to benefit from it.

House Bill 7171 would improve the Temporary Caregiver Insurance program in two very important ways. It would increase the number of weeks a person can use, from 6 to 12, and expand the category of who a worker can take time to care for to include grandchildren, siblings and care recipients, to reflect the changing compositions of households and care relationships. Having to alter life to care for loved ones is more commonplace than ever. The impacts of these realities result in increasing stress and demands on families, often presenting a choice between providing care to a loved one or paying the bills.

AARP strongly supports House Bill 7171 because it does make important steps towards making our TCI program stronger. With paid family leave stalling out in the United States Congress, it is on states to ensure that families have the tools to care for loved ones without fear of financial peril. We urge you to pass this essential legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Catherine Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Catherine Taylor

State Director, AARP Rhode Island