

February 13, 2024

Dear Chairperson Corvese and members of the House Labor Committee:

My name is Alex Birch and I live in Providence. I am a fellow in the Women's Policy Institute, but today I am writing to you as the mother of Joanna, my 3-year-old daughter.

I strongly support bill H7171 because I know personally how critical it is to have twelve weeks of paid leave. I was born and raised in Rhode Island — but when Joanna was born in January 2021, I was living in Massachusetts. Thankfully, that granted me access to 12 weeks of paid leave — double the time that I would have received if I lived in Rhode Island.

My birth and the beginning of Joanna's life were quite ordinary. I had no birth trauma or unforeseen pregnancy complications. My daughter was healthy and did not require additional medical attention. **However, even ordinary births require extraordinary physical recovery, caregiving, and logistics.** Every mother and child, no matter how ordinary the birth, need more than six weeks. It is not enough.

I asked several mothers I know to describe their experiences six weeks after birth. Many of us were still bleeding, changing our own diapers in addition to our babies. We were waking up 5 to 10 times a night, never getting to sleep more than a few hours at a time, so sleep deprived we could barely think straight. Our bodies were the baby's home, the only place they wanted to sleep, blocking our ability to meet basic needs like eating, going to the bathroom, and showering. We were facing postpartum anxiety, depression, hormonal shifts, night sweats, and leaking breasts. We were tied to our babies to breastfeed, or the pump to produce breastmilk, or the formula bottles that need constant refilling and washing. We loved our children and we were also overwhelmed by the transformation of our bodies, families, and lives.

I think there is a tendency to downplay these experiences. After all, people have kids all of the time and everyone seems to get through it and do fine enough. **I am here to tell you: we aren't doing fine.** I am writing to you because I want my daughter and future mothers in Rhode Island to have the time they need. 12 weeks of paid leave is the standard, and we should meet that in Rhode Island.

The parents of our state are depending on you. Please vote in favor of H7171.

Thank you,



Alex Birch
37 Vernon St.
Providence, RI
02903