



House Labor Committee Testimony in Support of H7171

TO: Rep. Arthur J. Corvese, Chair
Rep. Mary Messier, First Vice Chair
Rep. Karen Alzate, Second Vice Chair
Members of the House Labor Committee

FROM: American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN)

DATE: February 14, 2024

RE: Support for H7171

The American Cancer Society Cancer Action network (ACS CAN) is the non-partisan, non-profit advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society. We advocate for evidence-based public policies to reduce the cancer burden for everyone.

On behalf of ACS CAN, I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H7171. Our organization supports policies at the national, state, and local levels that increase access to job-protected paid family and medical leave that can be used for cancer treatments, survivorship care, and caregiving as well as other illnesses. We are thrilled to see the committee consider this legislation today, which would expand Rhode Island's existing paid family leave policy through the Temporary Caregiver Insurance (TCI) program.

ACS CAN believes that paid family and medical leave policies are critical to the unique needs of cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers. All working cancer patients, survivors, and caregivers should have access to paid family and medical leave that allows them to take time off work to attend to their own or a loved one's care without losing their job or income.

Rhode Island is a leader in providing paid family leave for families with babies, newly adopted or foster children, and seriously ill family members through the TCI program. However, while our state is one of only 11 in the country that offer state-based paid leave, Rhode Island maintains the shortest paid family leave program (up to six weeks) with the lowest wage replacement (60 percent) in the country.ⁱ H7171 would bring Rhode Island more in line with our neighboring states (MA & CT) by increasing the time an individual can collect paid family leave to 12-weeks in a 12-month period. It would also expand eligibility for TCI benefits to include siblings, grandchildren, and care dependent individuals.

Between 2017-2021, ACS CAN conducted multiple surveys to explore the impact of paid family and medical leave on cancer patients, survivors and caregivers.ⁱⁱ Results showed that access to paid medical/family leave makes an important difference for cancer patients, survivors and their



caregivers; contributing to positive outcomes like being able to complete treatment, manage symptoms and side effects and afford treatments.

The survey results also showed that, access to paid leave is a health equity issue. Respondents who reported having issues with cancer/caregiving and their job – including the quality of their work suffering, having to take two or more days off work in a row, or having to leave work early – most often tended to be those in lower income households, those with lower levels of education, younger respondents, and those working in smaller companies. Additionally, those respondents who had paid medical/family leave were less likely to report experiencing problems related to financial pressures than those who did not have it.

About 1 in 4 employees (24 percent) in the private sector workforce have access to paid family leave and only two in five have access to short-term disability insurance through their jobs that allows them to receive partial pay while they recover from their own serious health issue.^{iii, iv} People of color and those with lower incomes are less likely to have access to paid family medical leave. These groups of people are also disproportionately impacted by diseases like cancer - meaning the very patients who are more likely to need to use paid family and medical leave are the ones least likely to have access to it.

For the above reasons, ACS CAN strongly urges passage of H7171 to expand paid family leave in Rhode Island. Please feel free to contact ACS CAN’s Rhode Island Government Relations Director, Ryan Strik, at ryan.strik@cancer.org or at (401) 259-1052 for any additional questions or information.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Strik".

Ryan T. Strik

Rhode Island Government Relations Director,
ACS CAN

ⁱ See <https://rightfromthestartri.org/2023-rhode-island-family-leave-legislation-fact-sheet/>

ⁱⁱ See <https://www.fightcancer.org/policy-resources/survivor-views-missed-work-and-paid-leave> & <https://www.fightcancer.org/releases/survey-cancer-patients-report-paid-leave-improves-their-ability-complete-treatment-manage> & <https://www.fightcancer.org/releases/new-survey-shows-clear-need-paid-leave-among-cancer-patients-and-survivors>

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Table 7. Leave benefits by average wage category, private industry workers, March 2022,” in “National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2022,” September 2022, Excel file (“private-average-wage-category-2022”) available at <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2022/home.htm>.

^{iv} U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Employee Benefits in the United States – March 2022, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ebs2.pdf>