

Testimony in support of H 7171
An Act Relating To Labor And Labor Relations -- Temporary Disability Insurance --
General Provisions
Paid Family Leave Expansion
House Committee on Labor
February 14, 2024
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The Economic Progress Institute strongly supports Representative Giraldo's H 7171, which expands Rhode Island's paid family leave program (TCL) benefits to 12 weeks, expands benefits to include leave for siblings, grandchildren, or care recipients, and increases the weekly dependent's allowance from \$10 to \$20, or 7% of benefit rate, whichever is greater.

No one should have to choose between their economic security and their family. Everyone deserves the opportunity to take care of their loved ones during times of need. Rhode Island's paid family leave program allows our workers the option to take job-protected, partially-paid leave to bond with a newborn or care for an ill family member. Once a leader in passing paid family leave in 2013, Rhode Island has fallen behind several newer state programs that provide more comprehensive leave, including our neighbors in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Rhode Island currently provides new parents and caregivers with 6 weeks of paid family leave. This is the shortest length out of the dozen state paid family leave programs in the country. Rhode Island is not meeting public health and medical guidelines by providing its workers with 6 weeks of paid family leave.¹ Twelve weeks of paid family leave means parents have more time to breastfeed and bond with their babies, children have more time to care for a dying parent, and partners have more time to coordinate care for their spouse undergoing chemotherapy.

Many Rhode Islanders are family caregivers and are responsible for their ailing siblings, grandchildren, and other loved ones. An inclusive paid family leave program recognizes that Rhode Island has diverse families who may not have immediate family to care for them, such as the immigrant, LGBTQ+, and foster child communities. Expanding paid family leave is also proven to reduce the need for nursing homes and help elders age in place.² This is critical considering one in four Rhode Islanders will be at or over the age of 65 by 2030.³ Expanding paid family leave now means more security and independence for our elders and more Rhode Islanders getting the care they need to recover.

¹ <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/the-child-development-case-for-a-national-paid-family-and-medical-leave-insurance-program.pdf>

² <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/paid-leave-means-a-stronger-rhode-island.pdf>

³ <https://oha.ri.gov/who-we-are/key-facts>

Rhode Island's paid family leave program is fully funded by our workforce; however, workers only receive about 60% of their salary while taking paid family leave. The current program is not fully accessible or equitable for our essential workers – those earning minimum wage working as CNAs and child care workers. Increasing the weekly dependent's allowance from \$10 to \$20 makes our paid family leave more accessible to these workers, who also deserve time to bond with newborns or care for their sick loved ones.

These are necessary budget neutral investments in our state's working families. We must improve paid family leave now to ensure that all Rhode Islanders can receive the care they deserve. A comprehensive paid family leave program means a stronger Rhode Island. We strongly urge passage.