

Elizabeth Burke Bryant

Good afternoon, Chairman Corvese and members of the House Committee on Labor. My name is Elizabeth Burke Bryant, and I am a Professor of the Practice of Health Policy, Services and Practice at the Brown University School of Public Health where I am based at the Hassenfeld Child Health Innovation Institute. I am providing this testimony in my individual capacity.

I strongly urge your favorable consideration and passage of H-7171 – Temporary Disability Insurance – General Provisions, sponsored by Representative Giraldo and co-sponsored by Representatives Kazarian, Casimiro, Alzate, Potter, Voas, Steward, Cruz, Boylan, and Morales. This bill would bring Rhode Island’s Paid Family Leave Program (known as Temporary Caregivers Insurance) up to the national standard of 12 weeks of leave and would update the definition of family to match the definition in Rhode Island’s earned sick leave statute.

In 2013, the Rhode Island General Assembly led the way in the nation by being the third state to enact a Paid Family Leave Program through the Temporary Caregiver Insurance Act. I remember so many legislators telling their personal stories of the importance of paid family leave for their families, including providing care for a newborn, an adopted child, or an ill family member.

Since that time, Rhode Island’s Paid Family Leave law has not kept pace with emerging research and best practices. Of the fourteen states with a paid family leave law, twelve of them, including Connecticut and Massachusetts, provide 12 weeks of paid family leave. Rhode Island provides up to six weeks – the shortest leave of any statewide paid family leave law in the country. Passage of this important bill would expand Rhode Island’s Paid Family Leave program/TCI from 6 weeks to 12 weeks to meet national standards.

The length of paid family leave matters for both overall family health and child development. Relationships with parents and other caregivers are critical to a baby’s early development and shape the architecture of the developing brain. Families need sufficient time for bonding with their baby, establishing breastfeeding, attending pediatric well-child visits (including receiving all necessary immunizations). Adequate paid family leave time is also associated with a reduced risk of post-partum depression. There are also economic and educational benefits – adequate paid family leave supports parents’ positive return to work after their leave and provides a strong foundation for babies’ healthy development and early learning. A strong start in life is critical to children’s social, emotional and cognitive development.

I respectfully urge your favorable consideration and passage of this important bill so that Rhode Island, which led the way a decade ago by being one of the first states to pass Paid Family Leave, continues to lead the way in our nation.

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