

February 14, 2024

Dear Chairperson Corvese and members of the House Labor Committee.

My name is Ellen Cynar and I live in Providence. I'm writing in support of H7171.

It is critical to expand paid leave coverage to 12 weeks to align with the reality of working RI caregivers, particularly those that are supporting both their children and their parents at the same time. This is a health and economic issue for Rhode Islanders of all ages.

I firsthand know the power of paid leave. I had both of my children in under two years. My pregnancies were very similar except for one critical difference – I had paid family leave with my second child, but not my first. During my first pregnancy, the only way I would get paid once I had my baby was through accrued sick or vacation time. *This dynamic leaves working RI parents pitting critical prenatal and postpartum care against the hopes of some paid time off after their child is born.* As a pregnant person, I went to over a dozen prenatal appointments. It increases if you have an at-risk pregnancy or have any complications. This translates into weeks of sick time spent on routine, prenatal care. I don't know any working parents with months of accrued paid time off, and so the accounting game began, as I hoarded every sick and vacation hour possible to at least cover some of my maternity leave. And none of this math considered any sick time I would need once I returned to work, and my son entered childcare. Like many working parents, I dread calls from school saying, "your kid is sick, and you need to pick them up".

A year after my son was born, I became pregnant with my daughter. This time I knew I would have six weeks covered, albeit still not in alignment with the amount of time medically recommended for postpartum care and bonding. A side note: during both of my pregnancies I was a municipal employee, which meant I was not eligible for RI's TCI program. This is also true for State of RI employees. The only reason I had paid family leave with my second child was because the City of Providence passed a policy, similar to TCI, because of this coverage gap.

I am also part of the sandwich generation that is caring for family members at both ends of the spectrum. In addition to birth and sick kids, we are juggling management of long-term care, joint replacements, substance use disorders, and dementia. *Working RI caregivers, at the height of their careers, are stretched thin trying to support their kids and parents, while also contributing significantly to RI's tax base.* And none of these medical events are just six-week issues.

Thank you for your consideration of H7171 to support working RI caregivers and the health of our families and economy.

Best, Ellen

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