

Chair Corvese and Members of the House Labor Committee,

I am writing today to express my strong support for H7171 sponsored by Rep Giraldo.

Rhode Island was a leader in 2013 when we passed paid family leave. At that time we established a program that provided a 60% wage replacement for workers who had paid into TDI/TCI otherwise known as our state's paid leave policy. It made it possible for families to be able to afford to take up to 4 weeks to care for a family member.

TCI's passage was revolutionary at the time. In the intervening years the rest of the country has set a standard that supports families and RI now lags far behind what is seen as strong paid leave policy.

Paid leave is necessary in a landscape like Rhode Island, where we are communities of close-knit families and where there is a shortage of affordable child care, a shortage of affordable nursing and rehabilitative care, a shortage of affordable options for care for intellectually and developmentally disabled and a shortage of behavioral health services.

Our family members take care of each other, but we are also absorbing the lack of supply within our care economy and in so doing, bearing deep economic burdens. These burdens are borne predominantly by the women in our families who are already impacted by pay inequities and are borne even more heavily by women of color in our most disadvantaged communities.

Paid family leave benefits workers in all sectors and now is the time to strengthen this program in the key ways outlined in H7171.

- First, the increase the number of weeks a worker can take paid leave to 12 weeks would bring us in line with best practice policies being enacted nationally and would provide adequate care and assure recovery or time for adequate care arrangements for ill family members. The average # of weeks used is generally lower than 12, but in many cases, caregivers need more than the current 6 weeks.
- Second, the legislation would expand the definition of who a worker can take time to care for, beyond immediate family, including caregivers, siblings and grandchildren, not included under our current paid leave policy, but who we know are recipients of care within our families.
- Third, the bill doubles the weekly dependent allowance from \$10 to \$20. While from a percentage point of view, this is a significant jump, the reality is that this is a first step in the right direction, but does not provide adequate meaningful coverage of the expenses of caregiving for children. It's a start, but deserves to be re-examined going forward.

H7171, if passed, would get Rhode Island closer to best practice from a policy standpoint and will contribute to economic stability and fewer disruptions in financial security in the face of common health issues affecting our families.

The current Temporary Caregivers' Insurance does not match the demand in Rhode Island and the COVID pandemic brought front and center the importance of family caregiving.

H7171 would go a long way in shoring up the financial health of households and communities by enabling caregivers and it is a simple, inexpensive solution.

Since 2020 and the start of the pandemic, we have had a perfect storm of family members needing care and experiencing economic hardship, yet the General Assembly has done little to make things easier for caregivers. Now is the time to remedy the situation.

I strongly urge you to pass H7171 out of committee so that it can be passed on the House floor and signed into law to benefit the workers of our state.

Sincerely,

Liana Cassar

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