

February 14, 2024

Rhode Island House of Representatives
House Labor
RI State House
Providence, RI 02904

Subject: Support – H7171

To the Honorable Members of the Rhode Island House of Representatives Labor Committee:

MLPB supports bill H-7171, which if passed, will improve Rhode Island’s Paid Family Leave by extending the leave length, broaden the class of family members workers can use Temporary Caregiver’s Insurance (TCI), and increase the weekly dependent allowance.

MLPB is a pathbreaking organization and is credited as the first medical-legal partnership nation-wide. Originally embedded within the Pediatrics Department at Boston Medical Center in 1993, MLPB spun off from BMC in 2012 and is now independently serving health and human service partners throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island. MLPB currently operates under the fiscal sponsorship of [TSNE](#).

MLPB equips medical and social service communities of care with legal education and problem-solving insights that foster prevention, health equity, and human-centered system change. Through training, consultation, and technical assistance – our team-facing legal partnering framework – MLPB helps health care workforce members and organizations better connect patients and populations to the legal resources and protections they seek. MLPB empowers care team members to become strengths-based, role-aligned partners in legal problem solving. MLPB consults on more than 1,000 questions from care teams about health-related social needs of their patients and delivers more than 70 trainings each year.

At a household level, our capacity-building expertise focuses on addressing immediate health related social needs for patients. MLPB seeks to disrupt the trajectory where social, economic or environmental factors transform into a legal and health crisis. At a population level, our work encourages communities of care to engage in systemic and policy change work.

In Rhode Island specifically, we work with communities of care that include Accountable Entities (AEs), community health teams, primary and family medicine practices, home visiting programs, and health equity zones. We are keenly aware of the challenges face Rhode Islanders face when taking leave to care for their new child or for a loved one who has fallen ill. We are particularly attuned to caregiver stress especially for those providing care to family with chronic and/or degenerative conditions.

While Rhode Island had been at the forefront of passing TCI, our current law is woefully inadequate to provide enough protected and paid leave that allows workers to provide meaningful, consistent,



and equitable care. Six weeks is often not enough time to provide caregiving to family members recovering from major surgeries, rehabilitating after accidents, or

receiving long treatment courses. Nor is it enough time for post-partum parents to nurse and bond with their child. And it is not enough time to support an aging family member who needs help in order to stay in the home.

Further, MLPB supports H-7171's effort to be inclusive of Rhode Island's families. Under the proposed bill, the family definition would be expanded to be more accessible to LGBTQ+ workers, immigrants, people who do not have immediate relatives or family members (including those who have aged out of the foster care system). Our communities are stronger when every member of the community can care for each other.

Right now, RI workers too often are forced to choose between their families and their jobs. Women make up nearly half of Rhode Island's labor force (49 percent) and more than one-quarter of its business owners (27 percent). 63 percent of RI Latina mothers and 54 percent of RI white mothers are key family breadwinners. When we include national level data, 79 percent of Black mothers, 64 percent of Native American mothers and 43 percent of AAPI mothers are breadwinners. When extended, TCI will permit caretaking workers to provide care for loved ones and remain in the work force.

We also know from multiple studies that paid leave supports all families, and also that it increases birth outcomes equity. Many of these studies and other information is available in [this report](#) about paid leave from the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities.

However, TCI is not just for women. TCI is for all parents, and for all family members who may need to care for a loved one. Longer TCI also supports fathers who want to play a larger role in their family's well-being. A strong RI TCI bolsters fathers by providing a supportive policy that offsets social stigmas about men as caregivers. A strong TCI also bolsters the ability of children to care for aging parents, and generally allows all of us the paid time we might need from time to time to care for our loved ones.

Thank you to Representative Giraldo, and his fellow sponsors, and to the House Labor Committee for taking on this important challenge and working to protect RI workers and their families.

Sincerely,

Jeannine Casselman
Law and Policy Director