

9 Highland Ave  
Narragansett, RI 02882

February 14, 2024

Dear Chairperson Corvese and members of the RI House Labor Committee:

My name is Melissa Kollitides, I am a resident and voter from Narragansett and I am a fellow in the Women's Policy Institute, sponsored by the Women's Fund of RI. I am writing to you today in support of Bill H7171 representing my experiences as a member of RI's business community for the past 20 years.

Based on my fortunate experience to have interviewed and hired hundreds of employees in RI, I have an insider's view to the challenge of attracting employees to our state. Frankly, inadequate paid family leave is a non-starter for most skilled, modern members of NE's labor force. Once a leader in paid family and medical leave, our state has fallen behind CT, MA and NY, directly impacting RI's ability to compete for the labor we need to power our businesses. RI businesses demand workers who can perform on the manufacturing floor, who can delight customers at the register or who can nurse and teach with passion – things a human can only do when free from the stress of the choice between caregiving for a family member or paying the bills. I write today asking that you consider passage of Bill H7171 which will rectify inequities in RI's current state provision for paid family leave.

Voluminous research documents the results of stress on caregiving employees; a sick family member is stressful, knowing you have no protection afforded to you to care for that family member without jeopardizing your employment, is beyond what most humans can handle. In fact, among employed caregivers, more than half reported that the stress of caregiving interfered with their employment ([NIH 2017](#)). **RI businesses simply don't need those kind of workers. In fact, we all know that having a committed, qualified, focused workforce from which to draw is key to a state's economic vitality.** Studies in CA, NJ and RI report positive or neutral impacts of paid family leave on workforce productivity and employee retention; increases in paid leave weeks by Google ([Wojcicki, 2016](#)), Accenture ([Vanderkam, 2016](#)), and Aetna ([Kleiman, 1991](#)) showed decreased attrition and/or increased the share of women returning to work. A similar pattern of improved retention was also observed for low-wage workers ([Appelbaum & Milkman, 2011](#)). A study on working mothers demonstrated those taking paid leave experience a 93% greater likelihood of staying in the workforce postpartum compared to those who take none ([Houser & Vartanian, 2012](#)). Another study found mothers who took paid family leave increased work hours and likely wages by 7% postpartum ([Rossin-Slater et al., 2013](#)).

Caring for today's worker with adequate benefit protection, funded by their own payroll contributions, is a triple win to employer, employee and the state. And the winning is not just short term. In fact, children cared for by a stable force are more likely to grow up to be more financially secure, ultimately fueling economic futures ([Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2022](#)). Alternatively, those taken care of by a caregiver who returns to work too soon due to lack of benefits may be forced to terminate care or treatment, greatly increasing the risk of relapse, eventually driving up our state's total healthcare burden and forcing some caregivers to exit the workforce entirely. In the NIH survey cited ([NIH 2017](#)), ~40% of respondents said they quit or retired early from the workforce due to caregiving demands. Record employees left the workforce during COVID; many have still not returned and our state's businesses are suffering. Just examine those who exited healthcare alone due to the multi-level burnout

of caring for others, themselves and their family members; the [NCSBN](#) states that 100,000 nurses alone left during COVID, with more exiting every day. Consider female employees, who are more likely to identify as caregivers ([World Journal of Psychiatry 2016](#)), and their likelihood to exit the workforce; the WSJ ([Weber, 2023](#)) declared that ~12 MM women left jobs due to pandemic disruptions. And the research shows that paid leave benefits too short in duration **actually push women out of the workforce** ([Keck & Saraceno, 2013](#)).

Ultimately, RI cannot afford these deleterious effects on our labor force if we want our economy to grow. The evidence is clear in favor of passage of H7171. Increasing the weeks of paid family leave from six to 12, expanding the definition of family and increasing the per child credit will 1) power the state's economy by increasing the numbers of individuals in the state's workforce 2) boost the productivity of current workers through worker retention and 3) align Rhode Island with medical expert guidance and decrease overall state healthcare costs.

We are constantly told RI is not friendly to business, let's pass H7171 for a more modern, stronger RI state economy. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
Melissa Kollitides  
Narragansett, RI 02882