

Testimony in SUPPORT of H 7171
Vimala Phongsavanh, Senior Director, External Affairs
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England
Rhode Island House Committee on Labor
Wednesday, February 14, 2024

Chairman Corvese and members of the House Committee on Labor,

My name is Vimala Phongsavanh, Senior Director of External Affairs at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves nearly 9,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services at our Rhode Island health center. Planned Parenthood believes all people should have access to quality, affordable health care as a basic human right— regardless of who you are, where you live, your income, if you have health insurance or your immigration status.

As advocates for reproductive freedom, we must consider all aspects of a person's life including those that may affect their economic stability. Paid family leave is a critical component of reproductive freedom, and everyone deserves the dignity and financial stability that it offers. Without it, mothers don't have the time needed to heal from childbirth, and families don't have time to bond with their new babies; families may face greater challenges in creating stable and nurturing homes for their children; working people sometimes must risk their livelihoods to care for sick or injured family members. Additionally, the expanded family definition will allow LGBTQ+ people, immigrants, and foster care communities to designate a caregiver and access to this critical benefit; and will help elders age in place.

We support this legislation with the following additions, as recommended by GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders (GLAD):

- Child means a **legal**, biological, adopted, or foster son or daughter, a stepson or stepdaughter, a legal ward, a son or daughter of a domestic partner, or a son or daughter of an employee who stands in loco parentis to that child.”
- Parent means a **legal**, biological, foster, or adoptive parent, a stepparent, a legal guardian, or other person who stands in loco parentis to the employee or the employee's spouse or domestic partner when he/she was a child.
- "Sibling" means children with a common parent or grandparent, including **legal siblings**, biological siblings, half-siblings, step-siblings, foster siblings, and adopted siblings

As Rhode Island law already recognizes, under the Rhode Island Uniform Parentage Act (RIUPA), signed into law in 2020, families form in so many ways, and it is critical to protect all children and respect all families. This is why inclusive family definitions are so important. Family relationships are not restricted to biology, adoption and foster care. Rather, important family relationships also arise through non-marital partnerships, birth, assisted reproduction, gestational carrier agreements, and more. It is critical that legislation such as this – that aims to promote the economic security of Rhode Island workers and the economic vitality of this state – fully includes all workers by recognizing the reality of today's diverse families and family structures.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England and our allies in the Rhode Island Coalition for Reproductive Freedom (RICRF) supports H 7171 (Rep. Giraldo) with recommended amendments supporting the health and economic security of Rhode Islanders and help families to thrive.



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