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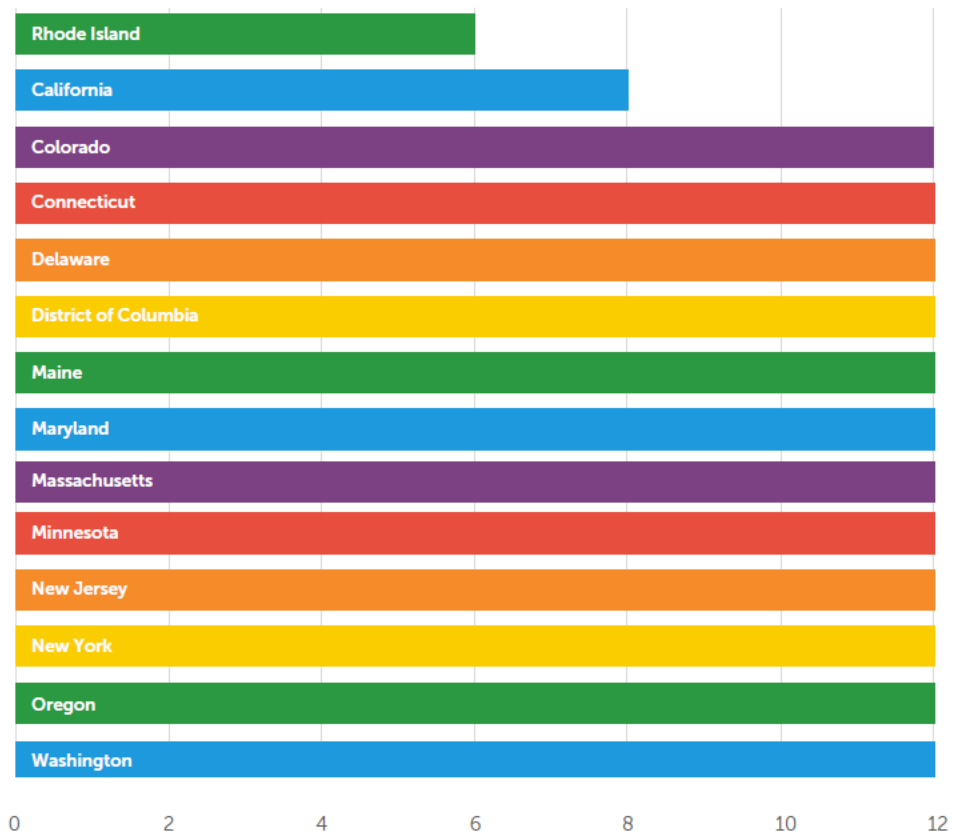
Testimony Re: H-7171, Temporary Caregivers Insurance
House Labor Committee
February 14, 2024
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst



Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that will help families with young children.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly support H-7171, Rep. Giraldo’s bill to add 6 additional weeks to the Temporary Caregivers Insurance Program to bring us up to the 12-week standard adopted by 12 other states (including Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and New York in the northeast) of paid family leave to care for new babies and newly adopted and foster children.

Rhode Island offers the shortest paid family leave in U.S. Rhode Island’s TCI provides a maximum of 6 weeks of paid family leave. This is the shortest length of any paid family leave policy in the country and **significantly less than the minimum 12 weeks of leave that researchers and medical professionals recommend** for new parents.



Adding 6 additional weeks would help over 6,000 parents who currently take leave each year.

Taking at least 12 weeks of time off from work to care for a new child improves both short-term and long-term maternal and child health outcomes and family economic outcomes. **National child care health and safety standards recommend that healthy children do not enter group child care until they are at least 12 weeks of age.**

The length of leave matters for family health and child development. Public health experts recommend a minimum of 12 weeks, and preferably 6 months, of leave for new parents. Nurturing, consistent relationships with parents and other caregivers are critical to a baby's early development, shaping the architecture of the developing brain. Sufficient time is essential for establishing breastfeeding, attending well-child medical visits, and ensuring that children receive all necessary immunizations. Adequate leave time is also associated with a reduced risk of post-partum depression.

Moving to 12 weeks will particularly help fathers and non-birthing parents take the leave they need to develop consistent, nurturing relationships with their children. When dads take leave, it helps improve the health of mothers and increases mother's lifetime labor force participation and earnings.

While we are focusing on bringing the length of Rhode Island's paid family leave up to a national standard this year --- next year, we'll work on bringing wage replacement rates up because low-wage workers cannot afford to take leave. **Rhode Island's wage replacement during paid family leave is the lowest in U.S.** Rhode Island's TCI wage replacement is currently at 60%, meaning that workers only receive up to 60% of their regular pay when on leave. This wage replacement is the lowest amongst all paid family leave policies in the country. **Expenses increase significantly when a new baby or child joins a family**, and families need their full paycheck to cover both their regular living expenses and to meet the needs of a baby.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT thanks the General Assembly for your efforts to ensure Rhode Island remains a leader in the nation in helping families.