



RHODE ISLAND WORKING FAMILIES PARTY

Representative Arthur Corvese, Chair
House Committee on Labor

Wednesday, February 14, 2024

Support for H-7171, Relating to Paid Leave Expansion

Chair Corvese and Members of the Committee,

The RI Working Families Party (RIWFP) wishes to express our strong support for H-7171 (Rep. Giraldo), which would expand Rhode Island's paid family leave system to 12 weeks and to broaden the definition of “family” within our state’s paid family leave policy. This support is grounded in RIWFP’s long-standing commitment to the welfare of working families and our belief in the fundamental right of all individuals to care for themselves and their loved ones without incurring financial hardship.

This Assembly was a national leader when it passed its Temporary Caregiver Insurance (TCI) system, setting a precedent for compassionate care policies. However, the evolving needs of our families, inflationary pressures, and the benchmarks set by neighboring states have revealed significant gaps in our current system. It is time to revisit the law and address some of the gaps that prevent some Rhode Island families from being able to access our paid family leave system at times of greatest need.

Bill H-7171 proposes two essential changes that we believe will significantly improve the lives of working families in our state:

- 1. Extension of Paid Leave Duration**

Increasing the duration of paid family leave to 12 weeks aligns Rhode Island with neighboring states like Massachusetts and Connecticut. This extension provides families with the option to take adequate time to care for their loved ones without the added stress of financial insecurity.

- 2. Expansion of “Family” Definition**

Updating the definition of “family” to include a broader range of caregiving relationships—such as grandparents and siblings—will more accurately reflect the diversity of family dynamics in our communities.

We would be remiss if we also did not take this opportunity to mention the need for addressing the issue of wage replacement and reimbursement rates for lower-income workers. While middle-income

families can somewhat afford to utilize TCI benefits, our lowest-wage workers are often left without support due to the insufficiency of the current 60% wage replacement rate. This discrepancy is particularly pronounced for individuals earning minimum wage and just above for whom taking time off at such a reduced rate is financially untenable. In contrast, our neighboring states like Massachusetts and Connecticut offer far higher levels of wage replacement for lower-income workers; with regard both to weeks and to wage-replacement rates, Rhode Island has fallen out-of-step with our neighboring states.

The RI Working Families Party wholeheartedly supports the proposed expansion of paid family leave to 12 weeks and the inclusive redefinition of family covered by H-7171. These changes would constitute vital steps toward ensuring that all Rhode Islanders can care for their loved ones without compromising their financial stability.

Respectfully submitted,

M. Zachary Mezera
RI Organizing Director
Working Families Party