



Memo To: House Committee on Labor

From: Angela McCalla, Policy and Advocacy Program Director, Women's Fund of Rhode Island

Date: February 28, 2024

Concerns: **SUPPORT FOR H-7171**

Women's Fund of Rhode Island (WFRI) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to invest in women and girls through advocacy, research and strategic partnerships designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. We are writing to express our strong **support for H-7171 which would expand the definition of caregiver recipients, provide benefits of 12 weeks and increase weekly dependent's allowances from \$10 to \$20 or 7% of benefit rate whichever is greater.**

According to [ABT Associates research, low wage employees report needing but not taking leave more often than other employees because they simply cannot afford to take unpaid time out of work](#). This is true in Rhode Island, where our current paid leave policy caps salary reimbursement at 60%, leaving low-income employees little/no choice but to continue working in order to pay for basic needs. For businesses, paid family leave is an important benefit which results in increased employee productivity, staff morale, and is an important employee retention strategy in recruiting necessary talent. Additionally, family leave has shown positive outcomes regarding social disparities, health, and well being for both children and the employee.

According to [National Partnership for Women and Families](#), several studies have found that the length of paid leave matters for maternal and infant health. Findings include:

- Less than eight weeks of paid leave is linked to a reduction in overall health status and increased depression. Every additional week of paid leave a mother takes reduces the likelihood of reporting poor mental well-being by 2 percent.
- Longer paid leave significantly increases breastfeeding initiation and duration, which has innumerable benefits for moms and babies, including improving the function of the digestive and immune system of the child, and reduces risk of breast and ovarian cancer, diabetes, and obesity for the mother.
- Paid leave greater than 12 weeks increases infant immunization uptake.

For people working in low-wage and part-time jobs — most of whom are women and people of color — access to paid leave is limited; among the 25 percent lowest-paid workers, only 9 percent had access to paid family leave in 2020.

Our Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and people of color are most likely to lack paid leave due to racial and ethnic disparities. Black and Latino workers are less likely than their white counterparts to have any paid leave. This is, in part, due to past and present systemic racism that has resulted in

significant health and economic inequities. In addition, a disproportionate number of workplace pregnancy discrimination claims were filed by Black women between 2011 and 2015. These claims included being fired for taking maternity leave, being denied a promotion or raise due to pregnancy, having inadequate maternity leave allowance, and having to endure physically taxing work conditions or extreme manual labor during pregnancy.

Supporting **H-7171** would ensure eligible workers have paid leave to care for a new child or seriously ill family member, be especially impactful for BIPOC families, AND is good for our business community. We urge you to support this bill.

The mission of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island is to invest in women and girls through advocacy, research, and strategic partnership designed to achieve gender equity through systemic change. Our [Women's Well-Being Index](#) compares how well women fare against men on topics related to health, safety, economic security, education and civic participation in every RI city/town. Our [policy briefs](#) are written in response to the data found on the Index. You can find more about our work at www.wfri.org.