

House Ways and Means Committee

Public Testimony of the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)
H.R. 1185/S. 463: *Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act*
Submitted by: Madeline Granato, Policy Director and Kristina Carvalho, MSW Intern
January 27, 2020

The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide, nonprofit organization that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. For forty-five years, CWEALF is a leading advocate of policy solutions that enhance women's economic security and combat discrimination at work.

We urge the Committee to support H.R. 1185/S. 463: *Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act*.

CWEALF leads the Connecticut Campaign for Paid Family Leave, a coalition of more than 75 organizations that has advocated for comprehensive paid family and medical leave in our state since 2012. In 2019, Connecticut passed a strong, comprehensive paid family and medical leave law that ensures workers can take time to address serious health and caregiving needs.

The vast majority of working people in the United States do not have access to paid family and medical leave. More than 100 million people – or 81 percent of workers – do not have paid family leave through their jobs, and more than 60 percent lack access to paid personal medical leave through their employer.ⁱ Access rates for workers in lower-wage jobs are even lower, and most recent private sector advances in paid leave benefits are disproportionately concentrated in higher-skill industries and among higher-paid employees, which creates even greater disparities between lower- and higher-paid workers.ⁱⁱ

Even unpaid leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is inaccessible to nearly two-thirds of working people, either because of eligibility restrictions or because they simply cannot afford to take unpaid leave.ⁱⁱⁱ This means that when serious personal or family health needs inevitably arise, workers face impossible choices between their families' well-being, their financial security and their jobs.

Universal paid family and medical leave as proposed by the FAMILY Act is a common sense, business and employee friendly solution to ensure all workers in across the nation have access to paid family and medical leave. The Connecticut Campaign for Paid Family Leave supports a "real" nationwide paid leave program that includes:

1. High wage replacement and job protection for all workers: High wage replacement is critical to ensure that the program is accessible to low-wage workers, who cannot afford to miss any portion of their paychecks. In Connecticut, research shows that 40% of households cannot afford basic necessities such as housing, food, transportation, health care, childcare and more^{iv}, even without a sudden family or health crisis.

It is also critical that workers have the peace of mind that they will return to their jobs when they return from leave, regardless of the size of their employer. Job protection for all workers, of all employer sizes, is a critical component to ensure that workers will utilize paid leave and will not risk any part of their financial or job security while doing so.

2. Family and medical leave coverage: H.R. 1185/S. 463 includes the ability to take paid leave for family caregiving and medical reasons. Currently, the majority of unpaid FMLA claims are for a worker's own personal illness. Coverage of both family and medical leave will encourage men to take paid leave to care for their families to further equalize and caregiving responsibilities among men and women and normalize male caregiving in the workplace.
3. FMLA's expanded definition of family: We support a paid family and medical leave program that expands on FMLA's definition of family member to include siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, children over the age of 18, and any other individual related by blood or whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a family relationship. Due to cultural, economic, and social forces, the overwhelming majority of households today depart from the "nuclear family" model of a married husband, wife, and their children. This language mirrors paid family and medical leave legislation recently passed here in Connecticut, New Jersey and paid sick leave ordinances in several municipalities across the country. The federal government has also used a similar definition in providing paid sick leave for federal contractors for decades.

Contrary to the outdated rhetoric that pro-worker policies somehow harm businesses, national research demonstrates that paid family and medical leave boasts strong benefits for businesses and the broader economy.^v In recent years, several larger businesses, including Google, Hilton, Etsy and Microsoft, expanded their parental leave policies. Deloitte now offers up to 16 weeks of fully paid leave for family care. The reason for this expansion is simple: paid family and medical leave benefits their bottom line.

Paid leave boosts productivity, attracts top-notch, young workers, lowers expensive turnover costs and fosters a greater attachment to the labor force. Research from other states shows that paid leave is a major "win" for business. In California, a state with a paid leave program for more than 10 years, almost 90% of businesses surveyed nearly fifteen years after the implementation of paid family leave reported that it had a neutral or positive impact on business.^{vi} Research on the business impact of New Jersey and Rhode Island's paid leave programs show similar results. Here in Connecticut, a 2017 poll by BLS Research & Consulting found that 77% of small business owners in our state support paid

leave legislation. When respondents learned more about the benefits of paid leave, support climbed to 82%. In 2015, a Harvard Business Review study found that nearly 40% of millennials would move to another country for better parental leave benefits.^{vii} We must act now to retain skilled workers and support young people and families across the country.

Access to paid family and medical leave should not depend on what state a worker lives in, where they work or who they work for. As a nation, we must escape the false notion that policies such as paid family and medical leave that support workers do so at a cost to businesses. We must invest in policies that prioritize the physical, emotional and financial well-being of our workforce, with the knowledge that this, in turn, will lead to economic prosperity and a competitive economy.

Thank you for your consideration.

ⁱ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2019, September). National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2019 (Tables 16 and 31). Retrieved 22 January 2020, from

<https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2019/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2019.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Ibid; National Partnership for Women & Families. (2019, September). New Data Show Slow Progress on Increasing Access to Paid Leave and Paid Sick Days [Press release]. Retrieved 22 January 2020, from

<https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-impact/news-room/new-data-show-slow-progress-on-access-to-paid-leave-paid-sick-days.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Joshi, P., Baldiga, M., & Huber, R. (2020). Unequal access to FMLA leave persists. Retrieved 22 January 2020 from Brandeis University, The Heller School, Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy website:

<http://new.diversitydatakids.org/research-library/data-visualization/unequal-access-fmla-leave-persists>

^{iv} Connecticut United Ways. (2018), ALICE: A Study of Financial Hardship in Connecticut. Retrieved 20 January 2020, from http://alice.ctunitedway.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/CT-United-Ways-2018-ALICE-Report-8.13.18_Hires-1.pdf

^v Applebaum, Eileen and Milkman, Ruth, "Leaves that Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences With Paid Family Leave in California," Rutgers Center for Women and Work, January 2011.

^{vi} See note 6.

^{vii} Harvard Business Review. Millennials say they'll relocate for work-life flexibility. May 7, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://hbr.org/2015/05/millennials-say-theyll-relocate-for-work-life-flexibility>