

COVE TESTIMONY ON H.208
2/4/14 - HOUSE GENERAL, HOUSING & MILITARY AFFAIRS
Gini Milkey, Executive Director

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on H.208. I'm Gini Milkey, Executive Director of COVE, the Community of Vermont Elders. COVE is a non-profit, membership organization whose mission is to promote and protect a higher quality of life for Vermont's elders, through education and advocacy.

COVE supports H.208, particularly for the positive impact it will have on elders:

- Family members provide a large percentage of the care needed by their older members who are no longer able to fully care for themselves. Elders who remain in the workforce and who have an older family member in declining health may need to take time off from time to time to arrange for that loved one's care, oversee a transition to a new caregiver, or respond to an emergency. Grandparents raising grandchildren (kinship care) may need to stay home with a sick grandchild, take the child to a medical appointment, etc. In neither case should the worker have to suffer the financial hardship of having to take unpaid leave to care for a family member, and H.208 would help to prevent that hardship by allowing them to earn paid time off.
- Because the majority of kinship situations involve voluntary guardianships, some grandparents have not been allowed to take time off for a sick grandchild because they are not the "legal guardian." We believe that the word "ward" may take care of that issue.
- Those elders who are frail or in declining health, along with other vulnerable adults, will benefit from this bill because they will know that, when necessary, their family members will be able to take paid time off to help them get the care they need, assist them through a transition, or respond to an emergency.
- We hear all the time that Vermont is the second oldest state in the country, and that our population is aging at a rate faster than the national average. Paid sick leave is and will continue to be a critical element in families' ability to provide or arrange for care for their older, frailer members.

Background information, from my testimony at the public hearing on H.208 held last April:

- According to the Center for American Progress:
 - By 2050 up to 20.2 percent of the American population is projected to be over the age of 65. At present, nearly 20 percent of those over the age of 65 need help with the basic activities of daily living, and the majority of elders with disabilities live in the community, not nursing homes or other care facilities. While both men and women see a reduction in their paid work hours when providing unpaid elder care, the effect is stronger for women. Paid family and medical leave would allow workers to provide the care their elder parents need, without having to sacrifice their own livelihoods.

➤ According to the National Partnership for Women and Families:

- Despite the importance of care giving to the health and well-being of our nation's older people, caregivers face serious economic challenges, especially without paid sick days. Care giving, especially among elders with multiple chronic conditions, plays a leading role in helping delay or prevent the use of nursing home care, and reduces the chance that elders will need skilled nursing or home health care.
- Among caregivers, 37% reported that they had to quit work or reduce their hours because of their care giving responsibilities.
- Over 34 million caregivers provide assistance at the weekly equivalent of a part time job (more than 21 hours), and the estimated economic value of this support is roughly equal to \$350 billion.

Addendum, February 5, 2014:

1. "Ward" does cover the voluntary guardianship situation, according to our legal consultants.
2. We would like to suggest the addition of "grandparent-in-law" in two places on page 7 of the bill as introduced: on lines 5 and 10, following the word "grandparent." Adding that language would ensure, as with "parent-in-law," that either a grandchild or a grandchild-in-law would be entitled to use paid sick time.