

To: Chairperson Head and members of the House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs

Date: March 2, 2017

Re: Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program

Thank you for the opportunity to share my family's story with you.

In May of last year, I was 3 months pregnant and my father was dying. My baby was due in November, and though my father's terminal illness was harder to assess, I was clear that I wanted to spend whatever time he had left by his side, supporting my family with his care. By this time, he had been living with a symptom maintenance schedule that required him to wake every four hours- and that meant my mom was up too. Neither had slept through the night in three years, it was taking a toll on my mother's stamina as a caregiver. She needed help.

It was a difficult decision to leave my job, but my family and I knew that between the stress of work and daddy's illness, I could at least shed one potential regret by being there to help fulfill his wish to spend his last days at his home on Echo Lake. We thought we might have months of care to give. His illness progressed erratically, one day he'd beg our help to get on his tractor to move mulch, the next he'd be too debilitated to spend much of the day out of his chair. But it seemed very possible that he would make it through to seeing his new grandchild born.

My husband and I got our finances organized. With only one income we needed to do some serious planning to ensure that we could afford one extended leave that we absolutely knew he would need to take this year- two weeks to spend with our new baby after her arrival in the autumn. My husband's employer was extremely supportive of our plan for "paternity time", but the very small company does not offer paid leave. We felt ready for the year ahead, and focused on our family.

In mid-June, daddy's condition began a rapid decline. By July, we realized that the women of the family would not be able to sustain this plan without the support of in-home caregivers to help lift and move him through the necessary daily transitions from bed, to bath, etc. We did our absolute best to make it through; we ordered equipment for home care, and I spent hours and hours reading about transport techniques and trying to teach my dad how to help us help him with particular body positioning for moves from bed to wheelchair, wheelchair to bath, etc. It wasn't enough. With my growing pregnancy, and my father's sudden and complete loss of body strength and control, my husband quickly became the only person strong enough to provide this care- home health is very understaffed in our area and would not be able to assign paid-caregivers, trained to use specialized transfer equipment, for several weeks.

It was clear, the two weeks we had planned for my husband to be home with the baby and me were coming into use for this family crisis. Thankfully we had initiated some savings ahead of

time, and thankfully again for Danny's very supportive employer who understood the need for an immediate leave from work. Danny took the time off and ensured that my dad's final two weeks of life were spend at home, on Echo Lake, surrounded by his family. He died on July 15th, 2016.

Though we still took those two weeks of family time when our baby arrived in October, the financial stress is real, and we understand in a much more personal way how important paid leave policies are.

Our year has been one of both crisis and celebration. I believe that the Paid Family Medical Leave bill is Vermont's best option for protecting Vermonters from the financial hardship that comes with events of life, and death, that will affect us all.

Samantha Stevens
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