



Building a Safe Harbor for Vermont Elders through Advocacy and Education

**COVE TESTIMONY ON H.196
HOUSE GENERAL, HOUSING & MILITARY AFFAIRS
3/2/17 - Gini Milkey, Executive Director**

Thank you for providing COVE the opportunity to testify on H. 196. 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.

H. 196 as introduced will benefit older Vermonters in several ways:

- With Vermont's aging population, more and more working Vermonters will need the benefits of a family and medical leave program to care for their elder family members during extended illness or recovery from surgery, or to have adequate time to arrange for long-term care services when such services are needed, as doing so can take a significant amount of time. The leave envisioned in this bill will enable family members to help, without their having to make unaffordable economic sacrifices.
- As Vermont's opiate crisis has grown, more and more grandparents are finding themselves raising their grandchildren, many while still working. The benefits of this family and medical leave bill will be a great help to them as they attempt to rearrange their lives to make things work, to bring stability to the grandchild's life,

and to care for a grandchild who becomes seriously ill or disabled and needs extended care at home.

- Many elders remain in the workforce into their seventies, and this bill, if passed, will benefit them in all the other ways it will benefit workers of any age.
- I have also attached some background information related to this issue that I hope you will find useful.

The language in section 1 of this bill, statutory section 471 (3) (B) and (E) is critical to ensuring that the aforementioned benefits are realized, as is the language in section 2, statutory section 472 (3) and (5).

COVE would respectfully request that in § 471(3) (B) on line 16 (after the word “parent” and in § 472 (5) on line 3 (also after the word “parent,” you add the words “or grandparent.” Doing so would be consistent with including an employee’s grandparent in these sections. That would enable a couple to make the most appropriate decision about who would provide the care, regardless of whether the care provider was the child or child-in-law.

Including grandparents is especially important as the number of grandparents raising grandchildren continues to rise. When those grandchildren join the workforce, given the bond between them and the grandparent(s) who raised them, they should be able to use family leave to, in turn, care for those grandparents.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this bill, and please let me know if you have any questions or would like any additional information about the importance of paid family leave for our older citizens.

Background information that relates to this issue:

- 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:
 - 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.