

# VLIAC Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council

*“Celebrating 45 years of representing the interest of low income Vermonters”*

---

House Committee on Ways & Means

H.196 An act relating to paid family leave

The Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council supports the implementation of a statewide family leave policy that would allow Vermonters to have access to paid, job-protected leave to take time to bond with or care for a new child, recover from a serious long-term illness or injury, or care for a family member with a serious long-term illness or injury.

Smart employment policies like paid medical leave and insurance are essential in this economy where both parents need to work to make ends meet, especially for low wage earners or single mothers. Even older Americans are working longer and don't have retirement accounts to supplement meager Social Security Income.

Times have changed. It's not possible for someone in the family to be able to take time off work and lose that income to care for an aging parent or bond with a new infant. Having access to parental and medical leave are critical in today's working environment, if want to support women in the workforce, if we want to support young families, if we want to strengthen the economy and business.

Being able to meet your family responsibilities and remain financially secure has all kinds of social, physical, and mental wellbeing benefits. Having that time could be the difference between a young mother being able to reduce her anxiety and worry, breastfeed her baby, and realizing the well documented benefits that that 12 weeks of bonding creates. It could be the difference between an elder parent having to spend time in costly nursing home when they could be cared for, for a short period of time in their own home.

One of the key elements of this Vermont paid leave proposal is the 100% wage replacement. Where it might seem reasonable to reduce that benefit to something less - that is the real equity for low income earners, especial those close to the poverty level who's choice it will be to hand over a two week old infant to costly childcare, if available, or leaving your job, acquiring debt, and needing additional state assistance.

If we want an economy that works for all Vermonters, if we want people to have choices and be able to remain in the workforce, if we want to support small business that can't afford to provide these benefits, if we want happy and healthy families to remain in, and come to our state - then creating a statewide insurance program is the only way to ensure universal access to this important benefit.

Implementing a paid family leave policy in Vermont was one of the recommendations in the 2016 Governor's Pathways from Poverty Advisory Council to the administration.