

Thank you for the time to speak today.

My name is David Rose. I live in Burlington, but grew up in Manchester, Vermont, where my parents currently live. My father is a network administrator at The Vermont Country Store, and my mother is a paraeducator in the local school system, which was her job in March of 2006 when she received a call in the early evening from a local ski mountain, and learned that my father had gone off a jump, landed on his back and neck, and broken his T11 and T12 vertebrae. He had been airlifted to Dartmouth, and was paralyzed from the chest down.

My father's story has been re-told a thousand times, but as with many caregivers, partners, and families, the day to day path of healing and recovery is rarely heard outside the home. Our experience regarding family leave and advocacy thereof begins with my father's injury, but it centers on my mother's experience during the ordeal and in the months that followed.

As a caregiver, my mother's ability to have time away from employment—afforded to us by accumulated paid sick days and the generosity of co-workers who donated their own sick days to both of my parents as a meager supplement after ours ran out—gave her the flexibility to visit my father at the specialized rehab hospital six hours away in Philadelphia, and to research opportunities in adapted housing and further medical care without making desperate choices. But Vermont workers shouldn't have to deplete our accumulated time off when emergencies arise that require longer-term leave.

A guarantee to Vermonters of secure income for both patient and caregiver for twelve weeks would be life-changing for a family facing an emergency like a paralyzing spinal cord injury, and would help families avoid dipping into further social services.

The weeks following my father's injury were spent learning how to return to productivity, but outside of his healing process, it takes considerable time to handle all the medical paperwork, phone calls and long distance travel to appointments with medical specialists. To pick just one example, even after he returned home months after the injury, it took several weeks for my father to arrange to have the car adapted with hand controls, complete the paperwork to regain his license, and begin driving again; during this time, traveling to routine appointments was our family's task, and fell in turn to my mother.

Once he returned home, everything took much more time, as we relearned daily activities like dressing, bathing, and basic mobility. It was much safer for him to be with family while he practiced the skills that lead to independence.

My dad also left the hospital with a prescription for Oxycodone to address the immense pain he was in at the time—and he was able to wean himself off that pain relief because he wasn't attempting to return to work full-time right away. He had the time to heal when he needed it most. Specific to his injury, my parents had to wake up every two hours, every night, to physically turn his body to avoid getting skin pressure sores, which can lead to months of hospitalization. So for both patient and caregiver, it was essential to have enough recovery time to avoid further complications or dependence on painkillers.

My dad was injured March 2, 2006, and returned to work in late May (approximately 12 weeks). He spent a week at Dartmouth Hitchcock, six weeks at the rehabilitation center, and five weeks recovering at home. Like most paraplegics, he did not regain any sensation and also like most paraplegics, his life is just as active and productive now as it was twelve years ago before his injury. Our story took this path thanks to an employer who went to tremendous lengths so my dad could continue his career, and to the generosity of Vermonters in our community who donated their time, their expertise, and their own sick days so that my family could heal together.

Healing from a life-threatening injury and providing care for a family member should not require that we deplete our paid time off and go into debt or leave a spouse, child, or loved one without advocacy or care. My family believes it's time to make the privilege of safe, secure recovery a right granted to all Vermonters. Thank you.