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**Family & Medical Leave Insurance:
Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs**

April 10, 2018

Statement from Eric Spoerl

Thank you to Chairman Sirotkin and the members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development for accepting my testimony today.

My name is Eric Spoerl and I am a 35 year old single father of two little ones- five and seven. I currently work for The Alchemist in Waterbury, Vermont. I was born and raised in Vermont and proud to say I have lived and worked here my entire life. I am here today in support of the paid family medical leave act because I feel it's impact goes way beyond a dollar amount, it touches the fundamentals that we need to instill in our younger generation- compassion, stability, supporting one another, especially in times of need, and most of all love.

Before working at the Alchemist I worked a few different jobs. I have worked in excavation as well as building material sales. Even though they were good jobs that had decent benefits like sick days and vacation days, it was often impossible to use those benefits. Being a single father of two kids and having 50-50 custody, it's my responsibility to take care of the kids when I have them. There were times when my children were sick or had health issues and my employers would ask if I could have their mother watch them, even knowing we weren't together... as if it were her responsibility. I felt helpless at times. It was like pulling teeth to get the time off, and they wouldn't pay unless it was myself who was sick and had a doctors note. I would use my vacation time and if I didn't have any vacation and I would go without pay. It is a very stressful feeling, the need to provide your kids or loved ones with care when they're sick, but you worry about whether or not you are going to get paid or if you will still have job security. Being a single father with only one income, this situation threatened my livelihood and my ability to provide a safe and secure place for my children.

I also was unfortunate to have to witness what too many families do- my family not being able to be there for their loved ones when they were needed most. It came down to my family members either losing their employment or not being able to be there for their Mother, something that seems barbaric to have to decide in this day in age.

Today I work at the Alchemist and have been there for about two years. They offer a generous benefits package which includes sick pay for you and your family, as well as paid family medical leave. After having my past experiences with other employment this was a huge blessing. To be able to provide the love and care that my family needs in troubled times and have a company (family) that supports and recognizes the need for that. I have stability for my children, knowing I can be there for them physically and financially if, God forbids, a medical situation occurs. Now my children know that if something happens I will be there, and they don't have to worry about being with someone other than me until I'm done work.. or them having me there physically but my mind being preoccupied with the stress of our livelihood. I don't have to worry about seeing and going through what my family and many others have had to go through in times of need when something happens to a loved one.

Paid family medical leave goes way beyond the money...

You can put a dollar in anyone's pocket, they will spend it how they see fit, because it's theirs... It's a false sense of security. We can give people a system that can make a difference in time of need. We can provide real stability for our families- stability and security that parents can be there for their children or parents when they are sick, without the burden of worry. Through the paid family medical leave act, we have an opportunity to come together for the greater good of everyone. And being able to be there for our families, young and old... that's selfless and priceless..

In closing, I am a voice among many, who see the clear and present need for paid family leave. I wish that everyone could have this benefit that gives families piece of mind and security.

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