

Good evening, my name is Tiffany Sharp and I currently live in Fairfax with my husband and our 3 sons. I have been working for UVM full time for the past 13 years. Paid family and medical leave is extremely important to me on a personal level, as my employer does not offer paid family leave or up until very recently, short term disability insurance.

About 10 years ago my first son was born. My ex husband and I were fairly low income and didn't have much saved up both monetarily and in terms of accrued paid time off. Looking back, I think I was a bit crazy as I thought I would be able to take a mere 4 weeks for maternity leave. Little did I know that our baby would be born with a severe case of meconium aspiration syndrome and end up in the NICU for several weeks. By the time he was released my leave was pretty much up and I had to ask my employer for additional unpaid time off. The financial instability lead to increased stress and eventually a diagnosis of postpartum depression. The financial burden could have been prevented had a family and medical leave plan been in place.

Fast forward 10 years to 2017. I was pregnant with my second son, due in April. When we first decided to have another child I told my husband we would need to find a way to fund my maternity leave because I didn't want to be in the same situation my ex husband and I had been in. He agreed and we saved some of the money we had from refinancing our home and invested it in hopes of growing what we already had.

A few weeks before my due date my husband hurt his shoulder at work and was out off and on for a couple weeks, doing light duty work as it was available. The limited hours forced us to dip into our maternity leave money. Because he was working some hours, he was unable to claim workers compensation. A week overdue our son came into the world quickly and a bit dramatic, via emergency C-section. Because of the C-section my husband ended up taking more time off than planned to take care of me as well as our newborn.

The paid family and medical leave program would be a game changer for families like ours. Instead of going massively into debt and negatively impacting the economy in our area we would be able to stay current on our bills. The program would allow families to experience infinitely less stress and let them focus on bonding with their child or caring for an ill family member. Families are stretched too thin these days, we're expected to work, take care of our home and children and be active members of our communities, but with no real support from our local government. When we don't offer paid time off for people to deal with these things it harms everyone. The individual suffers physically, mentally and financially.

Employers struggle with employee retention, distracted employees, lower productivity and the inability to plan for emergencies. People are forced to seek benefits such as SNAP, WIC and Reachup in order to make ends meet. This doesn't make sense financially for families or for the state. We have other types of insurance in place, such as unemployment insurance, it just makes sense to have paid family and medical leave as well. It encourages families to continue working after having a child as they have adequate time to bond without the financial stress.

In closing, I would suggest that you look hard and long at the state of affairs in VT right now. Families are moving away because they cannot afford to stay here. We have an aging population that soon won't be able to support our economy. We need to pass this bill in order to both retain the young families that

are already here, and also to encourage new families to move to the area. I was born and raised here, but if we continue the way we're going we may be forced to move someplace more affordable.

Thank you for your time.