

To: Chair Sirotkin and the Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs
From: Angela Earle-Gray, Human Resources Director at Chroma Technology in Bellows Falls

As the HR Director for Chroma Technology in Bellows Falls, I'm proud to work for a company that deeply values its employees. In addition to offering living wages, health insurance, paid sick days, and other benefits, Chroma provides paid parental leave and short-term disability leave. We provide these benefits because we believe it is the right thing to do. We believe that everyone should be able to manage work and family needs without fear of losing wages or their job.

A full-time, minimum wage worker in Vermont would lose roughly \$4,500 taking 12 weeks of unpaid leave under current state and federal laws. Losing wages after the birth or adoption of a child or after an unexpected illness or injury would create financial instability for families of most any income level.

We've learned that minimizing the crisis up front is more effective than responding after the fact. We've seen that employees that push and try to return to the workplace before they are ready, take longer to be back and fully contributing. Employees who try return to work before they are ready require more resources to support.

Chroma has an advantage when we recruit because of our great benefit package. Vermont as a state having family leave program will help all of our companies and communities recruit and retain the skilled individuals we need to grow our economy.

I am excited to hear that this bill could pass this year. As the committee continues discussion in the coming weeks, I would encourage the committee to consider strengthening the bill to include personal medical leave. There is a significant need for leave for this purpose and we believe the program should be comprehensive. In fact, a 2007 study found that more than 40 percent of bankruptcies in the U.S. were the result of lost income due to unexpected serious illness. The cost of doing something is less than the cost of doing nothing.

We also are happy to see the bill maintains high wage replacement. Many private temporary disability insurance policies provide 60% wage replacement or less for people who are out on medical leave, and we have had employees refrain from taking a leave that would probably be in their best interest to take because the wage replacement was too low.

Paid family leave isn't a program in the best interest of the few; it's something that will benefit us all. It's time to get up to speed with the rest of the world and ensure that all workers have access to family and medical leave insurance.

Thank you for your time.