

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

April 10, 2018

Statement from Jen Kimmich, co-owner of The Alchemist

Thank you to Chairman Sirotkin and the members of the Senate Committee on Economic Development for accepting my testimony and considering the importance of access to a paid family medical leave program for all Vermonters.

At the Alchemist, our people are our greatest assets. We support our employees in many ways, including providing parental and family medical leave. We do this because we directly benefit: our employees are more productive and our turnover is nonexistent in large part because our employees are able to provide for their own care and their family's care. Many studies show that childcare, flexible work hours, and paid family leave all have a very high return on investment. Research suggests that paid leave boosts morale and productivity in the workplace. The more stability our employees have in their lives, the stronger and more stable our businesses become. I supported the Medical Leave bill with shared financing between employer and employees, and although I still prefer the shared financing model, I understand why this change was necessary under current constraints. The most important thing is that this program is put in place so that the benefit is universally available and accessible to all Vermonters when they need it. I am also happy that the employer opt-in language was included to encourage employers to contribute to the cost of this program. As an employer who already offers full wage replacement for 8 weeks, we will continue to provide our more comprehensive coverage.

Insurance is something that provides protection against a possible eventuality. This family medical leave program is not insurance- everyone needs to receive care at some point in their lives, and nearly all workers will experience a caregiving challenge during their working years. This year working families of Vermont will welcome newborns or newly adopted children, care for sick family members or aging parents, or need time to address their own personal illnesses or injuries. Successful paid leave programs have been implemented throughout the rest of the world and within individual states, and it is time for Vermont to adopt a policy that will strengthen our families, our workforce and our economy. We have an incredible opportunity to use this program as a recruitment tool for the state of Vermont as we look to grow our workforce.

Family Medical leave is also a gender issue. As women, we bear and give birth to our babies, but we are also responsible, much of the time, for providing care to our sick children and parents. Single parent households, those families that rely on 1 parent only to make ends meet, are overwhelmingly lead by women- about 2/3 in Vermont. If all working Vermonters pitch into the pool and contribute to a family medical leave program, it will help Vermont women gain a little bit of traction as we work towards addressing the gender pay gap and improving equality in the workplace.

This proposed paid leave program gives Vermont a unique opportunity to define who we are as a state- we are a culture that emphasizes a healthy work/family balance, gender equality and the ability for every parent to spend quality time with the people that matter most to them. As a business owner who cares deeply about the future of our state's economy and the health of our workforce, I strongly believe this policy will make a real difference in the lives of Vermont's working families and it will help create a baseline on which businesses like us can help build and strengthen Vermont's economy.