

My name is Katie Wawrzyniak. I was born and raised in Vermont. I left for many years, but came back here to raise my family. I currently work for a small family run business with a very generous benefit package for the size of the business, but it currently does not have an option for any long-term leave. I support Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance in Vermont for many reasons.

In 2002 my mother was diagnosed with cancer. She used all of her sick leave, vacation and personal leave in order to receive treatments. Once she ran out of those hours, her coworkers generously donated their sick leave to her. And then she ran out of those hours as well. Fortunately for her she worked for an amazing boss who refused to let her go without pay. She continued to receive a paycheck until she passed away a few months after her diagnosis. There are not many small businesses and organizations that are able to be that generous. The bill as passed by the House removed the personal leave portion of the bill. I strongly urge you to put that language back in. For many employees in Vermont a cancer diagnosis means working through chemo and radiation treatments; coming to work because they can't afford to stay home even though they are nauseous and risk exposure to viruses and bacteria with weakened immune systems. I can guarantee you that everyone in this room knows someone who has gone through these treatments. It is unimaginable to me that if not for her boss my mother would have had to go back to work just to earn enough money to live. She was blessed to get to focus on trying to survive cancer and not paying her bills. Shouldn't we want that for all Vermonters struggling with illnesses?

I have two beautiful daughters. When my first daughter was born I took four months off from my job - unpaid. I had to apply for WIC to help with the grocery bills. With my second daughter I only took two months off because we just couldn't afford to take any more time. I feel blessed that I was able to get as much time with them as I did because I have heard from so many other women who could only take *weeks* off because they couldn't afford more. Unfortunately staying home was not even an option for my husband as we needed at least one paycheck to survive. He had to miss out on those first precious months as is the case for so many fathers. Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance would help parents get that time with their newborn babies and give each child in Vermont a leg-up on their early development. The version that passed the house reduced the weeks of leave allowed from 12 to 6. Again, I implore you to restore the language to the original 12 weeks. A month and half is just not enough time to bond with a child and recover from the trauma of giving birth.

I support this bill (with the revisions mentioned earlier) because it just makes sense. If we want young people and families to come to Vermont to live, or stay in Vermont, we have to find a way to make it easier for them. If we want people to recover from illness and return to work, we need to allow them that option. If we want our children to thrive, we need to let their

parents spend time with them when they are born. It is just the right thing to do. Please support this bill. Thank you for your time.