

To: Chair Sirotkin and the Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs  
From: Nicole Grenier, Owner of Stowe Street Cafe in Waterbury

As the mother of two young children ages four and ten, I have had firsthand experiences with balancing work and family life and with the incredible challenges of accessing affordable, quality child care.

I support this proposal as a hard-working Vermont mother, business owner, and early childhood advocate and I believe that it will significantly contribute to healthier Vermont families, businesses and our economy. As your committee considers amending the bill in the coming weeks, I would encourage that you ensure the following components are restored:

- 12 weeks minimum
- Leave for personal illness or injury
- Self-employed option to elect to obtain coverage

I view the proposal for a paid family and medical leave insurance program as a critical piece of Vermont's complicated child care puzzle. With this proposal - as it was introduced - all working Vermonters would have access to a job-protected paid leave for up to 12 weeks to welcome a new child, to care for a seriously ill loved one or to take time to recover from their own serious injury or illness.

With up to twelve weeks available, working parents would be able to piece together up to six months of paid leave time total between them to be home with their new child, which is not only critical for the best outcomes for the entire family, but it would simultaneously reduce pressure on the already overwhelmed child care system by allowing parents to not require infant care for up to the first six months.

Even if I will never personally benefit from having access to paid leave to care for a new child, like all of us, I still face the likely need to at some point take time away from work to help care for an ill parent or other loved one, or recover from my own potential serious injury or illness.

As a small business owner, I am absolutely committed to ensuring that my hardworking, valuable employees also have the ability to take time to care for themselves and their loved ones without incurring a significant financial hardship or feeling torn between having to choose between family and work.

The fact is, that the majority of working Vermonters are employed by small businesses that, like mine, cannot afford to provide such a benefit on our own without the support of a state-managed program. At the same time, it is also true that even the largest and most successful of Vermont's

corporations stand to benefit from such a program by reducing their expenses while supporting their employees.

In addition to addressing the high costs of child care, Gov. Scott has declared the need to attract and retain more young people to the state while making life more affordable for all. A family and medical leave insurance program supports all of these points.

This program will go a long way toward helping attract and retain young professionals and families, which will contribute to a thriving, healthy Vermont economy and allow Vermont's small businesses to thrive and become more competitive employers.

Thank you,

Nicole Grenier  
Owner of Stowe Street Cafe in Waterbury