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To: Members of the House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs

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As an introduction to the committee, I am Keith E Goslant, a life-long gay Vermonter and current resident of Montpelier. I am submitting this written testimony to the committee as a private citizen in support of the passage of H. 107, an act relating to paid family leave. However, I have several questions, and some unsolicited suggestions, regarding the legislation as introduced for the committee's consideration.

My first question and suggestion: The language included in H.107, an act relating to paid family leave, relies upon the legal definition of "spouse" as a qualifying condition under which an employee can apply for family leave benefits. This definition, however, excludes what could be a significant portion of VT's LGBTQ employees.

The institution of "marriage," from which designation as a "spouse" originates, is one that is not embraced by all members of the VT's LGBTQ communities. But, the lack of this formal and legal recognition, does not imply these relationships are any less significant in the commitment undertaken by the parties involved, nor the need for family leave benefits when confronted by illness or child care responsibilities.

I would ask the committee to consider including a provision in the bill recognizing domestic partnerships that are not dependent upon a governmental legal mandate.

For example, the language of the bill might be similar to that used by the State of VT as relates to employee benefits. Language as it is currently included in the contract:

The State of Vermont offers coverage to Domestic Partners of employees. In order to be eligible to enroll a Domestic Partner, you must certify that the following criteria applies to you and your Domestic Partnership:

- *You are each other's sole domestic partner and have been in an exclusive and enduring domestic relationship, while sharing a residence, for not less than six consecutive months prior to the submission of this application.*
- *You are both eighteen years of age or older.*
- *Neither one of you is married to anyone.*
- *You are not related by blood closer than would bar marriage under Vermont State law.*
- *You are both competent to enter into a legally binding contract.*
- *You have agreed between yourselves to be responsible for each other's welfare.*

While this language is not perfect, it would extend what could be critical family leave benefits to a segment of VT's LGBTQ communities currently excluded under the proposed language.

An additional question and suggestion: Despite the advances made in VT with the inclusion of legal protections to, and greater social acceptance of, the LGBTQ communities, some individuals still face being ostracized from and by their birth families. In these instances, extended queer families are created with close friends taking on the traditional supportive family roles. These relationships are also deserving of recognition and support, yet, are much more difficult to define. I would ask the committee to consider recognizing the significance of these families by choice with the inclusion of the designation as a Durable Power for Health Care as a circumstance for which an employee would qualify for family leave.

My last question and suggestion: During the last legislative session new statutes were enacted expanding the definition of those persons who could be recognized as parents and having a parental relationship. I have concerns if the current language in H. 107 will include those individuals for whom a de facto parent status was granted, but for whom neither a formal adoption nor biological relationship exists. I would ask the committee to consider the specific inclusion of "de facto parent" into the bill, i.e. "serious illness of the employee's child, stepchild or ward who lives with the employee, foster child, **or for whom the employee has been granted de facto parent status,...**"

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important legislation and my concerns as they relate to the proposed bill.