

**Family & Medical Leave Insurance
Senate Committee on Economic Development**

**Statement from Jen Kimmich
CEO of The Alchemist, Board Chair of Main Street Alliance of Vermont**

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

A paid family and medical leave insurance program is a priority of mine because it's designed to support small businesses and their employees. A statewide paid family leave program, as proposed in H.107, would create a universal, portable benefit for working Vermonters at a minimal cost, leveling the playing field for our small businesses and allowing them to better compete with larger corporations.

Small businesses are a vital part of Vermont's economy and it is incumbent on us to actively look for ways to support our local employers and employees alike. Roughly 90% of our state's businesses have fewer than 20 employees and these are the businesses that are least likely to be able to offer paid family leave on their own. A statewide family leave insurance program would make it possible for all Vermont employers, regardless of their size, to ensure their employees can be successful providing for and caring for their families.

A paid family and medical leave insurance program is a great economic development tool for a small business state like Vermont. We want more young people and families to move to and stay in Vermont, and this is a great way to accomplish that goal. A strong, universal paid family leave program is an effective recruitment and retention tool for local, small businesses that are struggling to find ways to compete with larger corporations. And, this is also a great recruitment tool for the state of Vermont, and has the potential to help make our state more appealing to the young professionals and businesses we are trying to attract and retain.

A strong, universal paid family and medical leave insurance program will help ensure that our families and communities are healthy. Providing Vermonters with the ability to take time for themselves and their loved ones will support our citizens when they need it most. Access to paid medical leave is a big part of the solution as we focus on ways to address the growing health crisis in this state and across the country.

I thank all the legislators who have worked hard to move this bill along and make universal family and medical leave a priority this year. I look forward to working with the Vermont legislature this year to pass a strong bill that provides access to paid family and medical leave for every Vermonter.