



January 26th, 2022

Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

On behalf of the Vermont Family and Medical Leave Insurance (VT FaMLI) Coalition, we thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the critical topic of Paid Family and Medical Leave.

If we have learned anything as a nation throughout this pandemic it is that all workers need to have the financial resiliency to be able to put health and safety first and that for many, they lack the social safety net to be able to do so. We know that no one chooses when they get sick or injured and that nine months is a short runway for families to adequately save for a meaningful parental leave. We also know that when workers are tackled with life's most trying and most human of moments, these workers and their families are burdened by the crushing weight of their financial obligations. Nationally, only 40% of workers have access to paid family and medical leave and when you look at the amount of small businesses that we have here in Vermont including our over 60,000 solo-entrepreneurs, we have a majority of Vermonters who are simply left behind.

One such worker is Erin Butterfield, a hair stylist from Hyde Park. When her mother's cancer took a turn for the worse, she would make weekly drives to and from Connecticut in one day so as not to lose income. After her mother passed, she said that *"it hit me, months later... I regret focusing on things that don't really matter, now. Missing work and financials, shouldn't have played a role..."* To watch Erin's story, CLICK HERE:

<https://www.vtpaidleave.org/vtstories/erin-butterfield-hyde-park-vt>

Paid Leave By the Numbers:

- Only 19% of workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers, and just 40% have access to personal medical leave through employer-provided short-term disability insurance. - National Partnership for Women and Families

- 84% of U.S. voters support a national paid family and medical leave policy that covers ALL working people to care for a new child; a seriously ill, injured or disabled loved one; or their own health issue. - National Partnership for Women and Families
- Birthing parents with paid leave are 93% more likely to return to the workforce after childbirth than those who take no leave - National Partnership for Women and Families
- 1 in 7 middle aged adults is providing financial support to both an aging parent and a child - Pew Research Center
- 70% of small businesses support establishing a federal program to guarantee access to paid family and medical leave - Small Business Majority / Center for American Progress

The Vermont FaMLI Coalition believes that in order to have an equitable, affordable, and accessible Paid Family and Medical Leave program, it must include the following:

- Equal and Universal Access. Employees in ALL sizes of business and configurations should be covered, and ALL owners, self-employed people, and employees (whether part-time, full-time, or seasonal) are covered.
- Comprehensive Coverage. At least 12 weeks leave for parental, family, and serious personal medical leave covered without gender distinction.
- Inclusive. A simple and inclusive family definition to meet the needs of today's workforce.
- Affordable to Use. Maintain spending power of leave beneficiaries through progressive wage replacement with up to full replacement for lower-wage workers.
- Sustainable Funding. Is sustainably and responsibly funded to make the program affordable for businesses of all sizes.
- Efficient Public Administration. To ensure that benefits are distributed equitably, oversight and benefit distribution must be housed within state government.
- Solution-Oriented Support and Protection. Extensive outreach and technical assistance for businesses to launch and address issues such as extended employee absence, stability and predictability for employees as they return.

Launched in the summer of 2021, the Vermont FaMLI Coalition began their [“We Believe in Paid Leave” campaign](#) - working to lift up the voice of Vermont's workers, small businesses, and advocates calling on the federal government to pass a robust and equitable paid family and medical leave solution. You can see our campaign video, lifting up eight stories from throughout the state at: <https://www.vtpaidleave.org/vtstories/blog-post-title-one-grese> as well as their individual stories, such as Jessica's, at <https://www.vtpaidleave.org/vtstories>

Jessica, like many women and people of color here in Vermont and throughout the country, worked for years in the service industry, where often there is little to no access to any kind of benefits. While she now is the proud owner of Healing Arts Massage in South

Burlington, she is deeply concerned that there is no support for her as she and her husband look to grow their family or in the event of a medical crisis. To watch her story go to:

<https://www.vtpaidleave.org/vtstories/blog-post-title-two-z3x7x> and to read her commentary on the passage of Build Back Better, go to:

<https://vtdigger.org/2021/11/02/jessica-arencibia-i-know-what-it-is-to-fall-through-the-cracks-pa-ss-build-back-better/>

While we have resounding support from our federal delegation on this issue and we were hopeful to see it across the finish line, unfortunately, the future of Build Back Better and the development of a national paid family and medical leave solution remains uncertain. Ever resilient and ready to continue to advocate for a robust and equitable paid family and medical leave solution, the VT FaMLI coalition will continue to work with the legislature to make this program a reality here in Vermont. We thank you for the opportunity to share our stories with you and we look forward to the work ahead.

Sincerely,

Morgan Nichols - Main Street Alliance

Kara Casey- Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Michelle Fay - Voices for Vermont's Children

Alison Lamagna - Vermont Works for Women

Matt Levin - Vermont Early Child Advocacy Alliance

Don Tinney - President, Vermont-NEA

Lucy Leriche - Planned Parenthood of Northern New England

Carrie Stahler - Vermont Foodbank

Pat Heffernan - Women Business Owners Network

Faye Mack - Hunger Free Vermont

Kiah Morris - Rights and Democracy

Jordan Giaconia - Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility

James Lyall - ACLU of Vermont