

Vermonters Need Paid Leave

Breck Bowden
11 Brookes Ave.
Burlington, VT 05401

Thank you for allowing me to comment on the importance of including \$37 million in one-time funds required to stand-up H.66, a strong paid family and medical leave program, in the FY 2025 budget. My perspective is informed by being AARP Vermont volunteer, a partner, a father, and a grandfather.

I have seen firsthand how much effort, stress, and sacrifice are needed when a person unexpectedly needs to become a caregiver for another family member. Many years ago, my wife needed to take leave from her job to care for her ailing mother, who lived in another state. More recently, as a partner, I found it necessary to care for my wife when she sustained several severe injuries after a fall and needed help just getting around the house. As a father and grandfather, I've been fortunate to see the birth of three grandchildren to two sons. In each birth, my sons and their partners wanted and deserved to take time off to welcome the new additions to our families. While we are extremely fortunate that each of our grandchildren is healthy and happy, one grandchild has required numerous doctors' visits to address unusual allergy issues.

In each of these cases we were fortunate enough to have the resources (or other willing family members) to see our way through these challenges. But I am aware that for many Vermonters, similar challenges would be difficult to insurmountable.

As a volunteer at AARP Vermont, I have learned that nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of Vermont workers do not have access to paid family and medical leave. This makes workers extremely vulnerable to loss of pay – or even their job. I've also learned that across Vermont, 70,000 unpaid family caregivers provide critical support to their loved ones - often while juggling part-time or full-time work. They help older loved ones with medications and medical care, bathing and dressing, meals, chores, and much more. Caregiving can be expensive and stressful enough without sacrificing a paycheck, but that's the reality that many Vermont workers face.

I understand that the budget is tight this year; it always is. But the investment made by the state over the short stand-up period of this new program would reap enormous benefits, far into the future, for innumerable Vermont workers, especially in small businesses that can't afford to provide paid leave insurance through the private market. H.66 would eventually create a universal, self-supporting insurance program to protect the salaries and jobs of Vermont workers, for the equivalent cost of a cup of coffee in payroll deduction each week. Similar insurance in the commercial market is far more expensive for less generous coverage.

For these reasons, I strongly encourage you to include \$37M in the one-time funds to stand-up H.66 in the FY 2025 budget. Passage of this bill is well overdue and Vermont workers need the benefits that this bill provides.

Thank you. Breck Bowden