

**Nicole Sener, Executive Director of Milton Family Community Center - 2025 Testimony**  
[nsener@miltonfamilycenter.org](mailto:nsener@miltonfamilycenter.org); (802) 872-5531

My name is Nicole Sener. I am a resident of Essex Junction, the proud mother of a wily 2-year old boy and soon-to-be mother of 2. I am also the Executive Director of Milton Family Community Center, one of the 15 state-designated parent child centers focused on Strengthening Families.

I am testifying today to request the funding of start-up costs for a universal, state-run paid family and medical leave program with \$37 million in one-time funds.

This issue is incredibly important to me personally, and through the work I do as an employer and family advocate. When my son was born, I returned home grateful for an ultimately healthy outcome after a long, traumatic birthing experience and 7 days in the hospital. We got home on a Tuesday, and my husband's employer called him that Friday at 5pm to share that he was expected to be back in the office at 9am the following Monday. With my reduced salary, and our recent addition, my husband pushing back or quitting his job were not options for us. Instead, I was faced with unexpectedly figuring out how to take care of the baby on my own much earlier than anticipated, often breaking medical advice for my healthy recovery. My husband was forced to miss critical moments for early bonding with our child. We also added the stress of immediately starting to look for new jobs, and thankfully seeked out employers that explicitly support families.

Yet despite my passion and organizational support as a parent child center director for paid leave, the budget and benefits I can offer my team now as a small employer still fall short in allowing MFCC to provide paid leave as a benefit to our staff of about 30 employees. The importance of which continues to be voiced by my hardworking team. A recent staff retention survey named paid leave as a top priority for our staff. This same team of staff regularly supports households through the short-term and long-term impact of both the emotional and financial stress of caregiving - and we only see this impact growing as more families than ever access our food shelf, diaper bank, and other family supports. While my family had the social capital and long-term planning ability to overcome a combination of underfunded or nonexistent leave, and now put ourselves in a much different position as we await our second child's arrival, I am reminded everyday through my work at the parent child center that this opportunity does not exist for the majority of Vermont families.

Every child, every family, deserves a strong start. Vermonters can't wait for paid leave. Please fund the start-up costs for a universal, state-run paid family and medical leave program with \$37 million in one-time funds, and protect our most vulnerable children and families.