



**Feb 2, 2023**  
**House Committee on General and Housing**  
**Kara Casey**  
**Director of Economic Empowerment**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of H.66.

The VT Network has been a member of the FaMLI coalition for many years advocating for a strong Paid Family and Medical Leave program. We are especially excited to see the Safe leave provision in this year's bill and are in full support of this.

I will speak briefly to the impact of family and medical leave on survivors of violence, but the bulk of my testimony will be focused on Safe Leave.

The Vermont Network's mission is to uproot the causes of violence and build a world free of oppression where actions, beliefs, and systems support all people to thrive. Supporting programs that create economic security for workers is one way that we can build that world.

#### Economic Impact

We know that approximately 99% of survivors of domestic violence have experienced economic abuse as a part of that cycle of power and control. This has a significant impact on a survivor's ability to gain and maintain employment, save, build credit etc. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that individual victims of sexual violence incur \$122,461 over a lifetime which includes costs associated with lost wages<sup>1</sup>. Access to resources that increase economic stability are essential to a survivor being able to rebuild after experiencing violence.

After leaving an abusive relationship a survivor is often left as the sole provider for their family. Studies show that children's resiliency is increased when mothers are employed full-time — that is, gainful employment has a positive influence on their children's recovery from witnessing domestic violence.<sup>2</sup> So, if a mother is able to care for a new baby, ill family member or herself without losing out on income (and without having to quit her job) it can improve overall long term outcomes for her child/children.

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson et al., 2017

<sup>2</sup> <http://munews.missouri.edu/news-releases/2011/0707-mu-study-identifies-protective-factors-that-help-women-recover-from-childhood-violence/>



## Safe Leave

Speaking to the Safe Leave section, we are supportive of the qualified uses of the leave in Section 9 (b)(1)(B) on pages 44-45. It is broad and encompasses the many reasons that we see survivors and their families needing to take time off of work as a result of violence. Survivors deserve to be able to take the time to heal, seek support and safety for themselves and their children without the fear of losing income if they have access to accrued paid leave and without fear of losing their employment. This bill would improve survivors' access to safety planning, mental health resources, medical care, and if they choose the criminal legal system.

I am going to give some examples of the impacts of these pieces:

- In my position, I often support advocates who are working with survivors to gain safe housing. When a survivor is moving from an unsafe housing situation, the process is not as simple as just finding new housing. Many times, survivors work with advocates, community partners and family members to come up with a safety plan of when the safest time is to leave, what needs to be in place, what resources do they have, questions like- do I need to leave town? This bill would allow survivors to take time off to safety plan and to relocate or secure safe housing without losing out on income, without risking their employment which would make it harder for them to have the funds to gain new housing.
- The Vermont Network houses the Vermont Forensic Nursing Program. The SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Exam) Nurses have countless examples of survivors not getting the emergency medical care they need when they come to the ER after sexual assault. The SANE exam process can be long, and people opt out regularly, so they won't miss work. Patients will come to the hospital for emergent care needs after an experience of violence but then only get some or none of what can be offered (which comes free and with wrap around supports), because their jobs take priority, and the process takes time.
- I was recently told a story of a survivor who missed 5 days of work to prepare for and attend RFA (Relief from Abuse) extension hearings and depositions. Each of these depositions and hearings were cancelled on the day of for various reasons outside of the survivor's control. This also does not account for the hours of work missed in order to complete forensic interviews, meet with the State's Attorney, move to an undisclosed location and work with her advocate on safety planning over the course of the year. In addition to the economic instability created by needing to leave her home, missing out on work has created financial hardship that we often see has effects long after the violence ends.



### Required documentation

In section (2)(A) on page 46, we support the use of the word “may” - “may require an employee to provide documentation” and keeping it at “one” of the following sources as well as the ability for a survivor to self- certify and the confidentiality piece which are consistent with best practice and with other state and Federal laws. However, we would like to propose the following amendment:

(2)(A) An employer may require an employee to provide documentation of the need for the leave. An employee may provide one of the following:

Thank you for your thoughtful work on this important bill. If passed, it will inevitably have immense positive impact on the lives of survivors and their families in Vermont.