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Testimony Re: H-5912 Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Temporary Disability Insurance
House Finance Committee
May 9, 2019
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports House Bill 5912, which would expand the Temporary Caregivers Insurance Program to cover six weeks of leave beginning in 2020 and eight weeks of leave beginning in 2021. The bill will also increase the wage replacement benefits which will be a huge help for low-wage working parents.

The Temporary Caregivers Insurance Program (TCI) was established as part of TDI in 2013 and provides 4 weeks of partial pay coverage when workers need to take time off to care for a new child including newly adopted and foster children or to care for a seriously ill child, spouse, parent, domestic partner or.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supported the creation of the TCI program. Many national organizations promoting child development support paid family leave, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, ZERO TO THREE, the Center for Law and Social Policy, the National Center for Children in Poverty, and the Surgeon General of the United States.

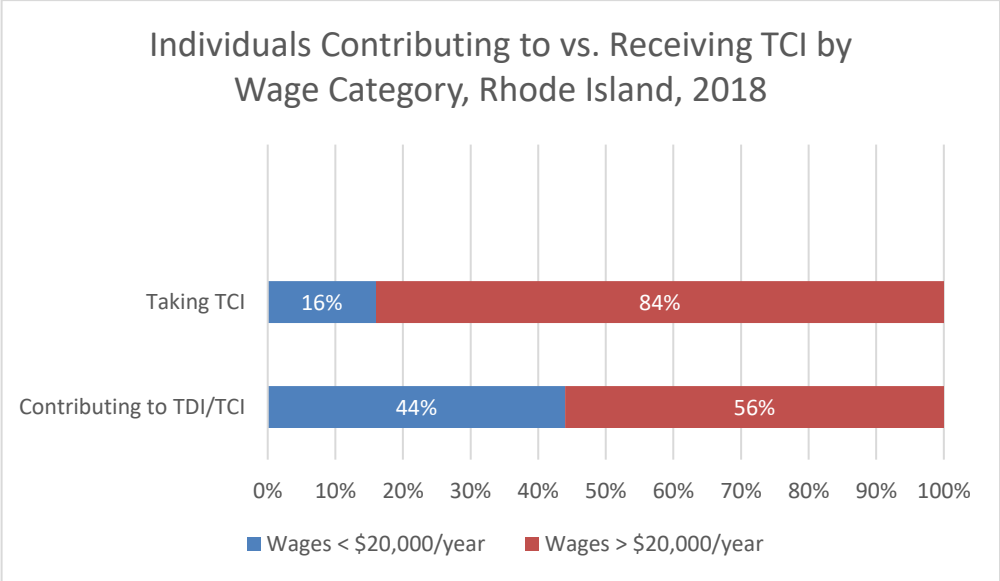
We strongly support the changes proposed in this bill to extend the number of weeks and increase the wage replacement rate to ensure that low-wage workers can take paid family leave for the recommended length of time to care for new children.

Experts agree that all parents should be able to take **at least 12 weeks off** to care for and bond with a new child. Current Rhode Island child care regulations do not allow infants under age 6 weeks to be enrolled in child care. National health and safety guidelines published by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Public Health Association specify that healthy, full-term infants should be at least 12 weeks old before they are enrolled in child care settings.

A June 2017 report that reviewed U.S. and international research on the length of paid family leave impacts on maternal and child health and well-being found that **six months of leave is recommended** to promote maternal health and well-being and **one year of leave** is recommended to optimize child health and well-being.

In 2018, there were 6,760 approved claims for Temporary Caregiver Insurance in Rhode Island. Of these, **80% were to care for a new child and almost all these claims were to care for a newborn child.** Families from every city and town in Rhode Island participated. Of the 5,390 approved claims to bond with a new child in 2018, 41% were for dads and 61% were for moms. Extending the number of weeks will greatly benefit dads and parents who take leave for foster children or adoptive children since they cannot receive the disability insurance that women who give birth can receive, yet they have just as important role to play in raising children.

Research indicates that **low wage workers are less likely to take unpaid leave or paid leave that does not provide adequate wage replacement** because they need steady income in order to meet their basic needs of housing and food. The changes proposed in this bill would help low wage workers take the recommended time off to care for newborn and newly adopted and foster children.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, 2018

Taking time off from work to care for a new child reduces infant mortality rates, improves breastfeeding rates and duration, and increases the likelihood that infants receive preventive medical care and immunizations.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT thanks the General Assembly for your leadership in establishing the TDI and TCI programs and urges passage of this bill that would make improvements, extending leave periods to meet national recommendations and improving participation for low-wage workers.