



Testimony Re: S-2549, Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Parental and Family Medical Leave Act
Senate Labor Committee
April 13, 2016
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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports Senate Bill 2549, which adds kinship and foster care to the definition of parental leave under Rhode Island's *Parental and Family Medical Leave Act*

Rhode Island's *Parental and Family Medical Leave Act* was passed in 1987, six years before the federal *Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)* was passed. It requires a minimum of 13 weeks of unpaid leave while the federal law requires 12 weeks. The federal law includes foster parents in the law but Rhode Island's does not.

Children in kinship and foster care have experienced trauma at home and then they frequently experience additional trauma when they are separated from their parents. Foster children require consistent, nurturing care from their foster parents.

National experts recommend that states support foster parents of young children to provide love and attention "as if the child were their own" so the child can develop emotional security. A foster parent of a young child often becomes the child's primary attachment figure.

Foster parents develop a substantial emotional investment in their foster children. They are responsible for nurturing and protecting the child as well as providing food, clothing, and a safe sleeping space. They are responsible for:

- arranging for timely and competent medical, vision, and dental care
- supporting visitation with the child's family as outlined in the child's service plan
- ensuring children attend school and participate in appropriate activities to promote language, social, emotional, and intellectual growth and development

As of December 31, 2015, there were 1,370 children in Rhode Island who were in foster care (711 in kinship foster care and 659 in non-relative foster care). Young children are more likely to be removed from their home and more likely to be placed in foster care (vs. congregate care) than older children. As of September 30, 2015 in Rhode Island, 99% of children under age six who were in out-of-home placement were in a foster or pre-adoptive home. In Rhode Island, the median length of time children spend in foster care is 14 months. Younger children under age 3 spend a greater length of time in foster care than older children.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT thanks the General Assembly for your leadership in enacting the *Parental and Family Medical Leave Act* before the federal law was passed. We urge passage of this bill to bring the bill up to date and to recognize the critical role of foster parents.