



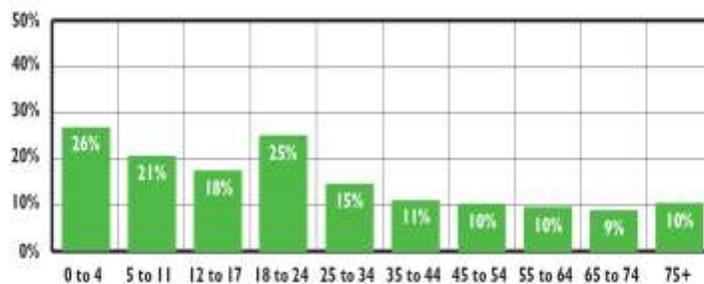
Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2721 - The Healthy and Safe Families and Workplaces Act
Senate Labor Committee
April 13, 2016
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports the *Healthy and Safe Families and Workplaces Act* which would allow all employees in Rhode Island to earn paid sick leave at the rate of one hour for every 30 hours worked up to a maximum 56 hours per year. It allows workers to use this time for their own illness or take care of an ill family member. It also allows workers to take time off to obtain services to address or escape domestic violence.

As stated in the bill, the majority (almost 60%) of private sector employees in Rhode Island already earn paid sick leave. High-wage workers are more likely to have paid sick leave than low-wage workers. Low-wage workers already struggle to make ends meet and face additional economic security issues when they need to take time off because they or their children are sick.

Paid sick time is an important policy that would help to improve family economic security. In Rhode Island and nationally, young children are the age group most likely to live in poverty with 26% of children under age 5 living below the poverty threshold. Young children are almost three times more likely to live in poverty than adults 65 years and older. Living in poverty during infancy and early childhood is especially harmful as research shows that economic insecurity in early childhood can compromise the child’s lifetime achievement and employment opportunities.

Percent of Population Living Below Poverty Threshold by Age, Rhode Island, 2011-2013



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011-2013. Table B17001.

The Rhode Island General Assembly is already recognized nationally for its leadership in establishing a paid family leave program through the Temporary Caregivers Insurance Program (TCI). This program helps families take paid time off after the birth, adoption or placement of a foster or to take care of a seriously ill family member. However, this program does not help employees who need to take time off periodically to care for ill children. Many employers across the country provide both earned sick time and paid family leave. However, these benefits are not as common for low-wage workers.

Families need paid sick time to care for their children when they experience routine illnesses. The TCI program provides coverage for serious illness that lasts one week or more. Most children experience several minor illnesses per year especially when they are young and their immune systems are still developing. Researchers estimate that children ages 1 to 3 years experience six to nine illnesses and children ages 4 to 10 years experience four to six illnesses per year.

According to pediatricians consulted by *Parents Magazine*, expected routine childhood illnesses include:

- Croup – at least one bout before age three
- Ear infections – up to two infections per year for children under age three
- Diarrhea and vomiting – up to one to three episodes per year during early childhood
- Strep throat - up to one infection per year
- Pneumonia – once or twice during childhood

This bill would also provide support for families experiencing and working to escape domestic violence. In 2014 in Rhode Island, there were 1,856 domestic violence incidents resulting in an arrest in which children were present. These incidents were reported in all 39 cities and towns in Rhode Island.

Five states and the District of Columbia have passed an earned sick leave law, including three states in New England: Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont. We strongly support this bill that would provide this important economic security support to Rhode Island families.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.