



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
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Testimony Re: S-145 Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Rhode Island Parental and Family Medical Leave Act
Senate Labor Committee
March 1, 2023
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports Senator Cano’s bill, S-145, which, as we understand it, would enable Rhode Island parents to take 24 weeks of job-protected family leave in a 12-month period after having a baby. These parents would also be entitled to 12 weeks of leave in the subsequent 12-month period under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act, if they had another child or needed to care for a seriously ill family member.

In 1987, Rhode Island passed a landmark Parental and Family Medical Leave Act, a full 6 years before the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was signed into law in 1993. The state law requires employers with 50 or more employees to provide **at least 13 weeks of job protected leave** over any 24-month period when they have a baby, when they are seriously ill, or to care for a serious ill family member. This leave can be paid or unpaid. The **federal law requires employers to provide at least 12 weeks over any 12-month period.**

So, currently Rhode Island families can receive 25 weeks over two years (13 weeks in one year under the 1987 state law and 12 weeks in the second year under the 1993 federal law).

Rhode Island remains a leader in the nation in requiring 13 weeks of job-protected leave that can be taken in one year. Expanding the leave to 24 weeks would be a significant step forward toward the goal of enabling each parent to take 26 weeks (6 months) of leave after having a baby.

We are also working this year to expand the state’s paid family leave program, Temporary Caregiver Insurance (TCI) to provide at least 12 weeks of paid leave for new parents and to increase the wage replacement rates to help lower-wage families be able to take the leave when needed.

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.**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT thanks the General Assembly for your efforts to ensure Rhode Island remains a leader in the nation in helping families.