



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
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Testimony Re: H-7444 Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – TDI/TCI General Provisions
House Finance Committee
April 13, 2022
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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT coordinates the Right from the Start Campaign, a state policy coalition led by eight organizations to advance state policies and budget priorities that will help families with young children.

Both Rhode Island KIDS COUNT and the Right from the Start Campaign strongly support H-7444, which would make needed improvements to the Temporary Caregivers Insurance (TCI) Program **to increase the wage replacement benefits so that more low-wage working parents can actually afford to take family leave to care for a baby or new child and extend the number of paid weeks available to 12 weeks per year, in line with national standards.**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supported the creation of the TCI program in 2013 and has actively worked to prevent proposals to weaken the program. 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. It also reduces maternal depression and child maltreatment.

Rhode Island has been a leader in the U.S. in providing paid family leave, but the TCI program now lags behind paid family leave programs enacted by every other state that has a program, providing the lowest wage replacement and the lowest number of weeks of leave.

We need to make improvements to our program to ensure equitable access for low-income families and to ensure that all parents, including parents who do not give birth, have access to at least 12 weeks of paid leave when they welcome a new baby or child into the family.

Research indicates that **low wage workers are less likely to take 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.

Experts agree that all parents should be able to take **at least 12 weeks off** to care for and bond with a new child. 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.

Paid family and medical leave reduces infant mortality rates, improves breastfeeding rates and duration, and increases the likelihood that infants receive preventive medical care and immunizations. It also reduces maternal depression and child maltreatment.

In 2021, There were 7,031 approved claims for TCI during; 75% were to care for a new child and 25% were to care for a seriously ill family member. Pre-pandemic, 80% of approved claims were to care for a new baby or child. Of the 5,303 approved claims for to care for a new child, 44% were for dads and 56% were for moms. **Families from every city and town in Rhode Island benefit from the TD/TCI programs which are an essential support for families with young children.**

In 2021, the Right from the Start Campaign convened a task force in 2021 to develop a 10-year vision and policy priorities that would improve access to high-quality child care, preschool, and paid family leave. Twenty-seven organizations (including the 8 organizations on the Right from the Start Campaign Steering Committee and the RI Parent Information Network, the Washington County Coalition for Children, RI NOW, The Women's Fund, SEIU 1199, the Working Families Party, Business Owners of Childcare Association, and others) participated on the task force and contributed to the development of the overarching agreements, policy priorities, and 10-year vision, **including an immediate goal to adopt best practices for the state's paid family leave program and work toward a 10-year goal of ensuring all new parents in Rhode Island can take 26 weeks of paid family leave.**

Right from the Start

Rhode Island
Child Care FORWARD
TASK FORCE AGREEMENTS

ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
Quality child care, quality preschool, and paid family leave are essential to:

- The health of our **economy**.
- The long term **educational success** of our kids.
- The **health, mental health, and well-being** of children and families.



Rhode Island
Child Care FORWARD
Task Force

PAID FAMILY LEAVE

Improve paid leave to help every
family care for their babies

IMMEDIATE GOALS

- Provide 12 weeks of leave.
- Include independent workers.
- Increase replacement wage to 90% for lower wage workers and 75% for everyone else.

10 YEAR VISION

- Provide 26 weeks of leave.
- Increase replacement wage to 90% for all workers.



Thank you to the General Assembly for your leadership in establishing the TDI and TCI programs. We urge passage of this bill that would make needed improvements, extending leave periods to meet national recommendations and improving wage replacement rates so more low-wage workers can afford to take the time they need at home with a new baby.