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Testimony Re: S-2245 Temporary Disability Insurance/Temporary Caregivers Insurance
Senate Labor Committee
March 30, 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 the proposal to add 4 additional weeks to the Temporary Caregivers Insurance Program to bring us closer to the goal of insuring all new parents have at least 12 weeks of paid family leave to care for new babies and newly adopted and foster children.

Rhode Island is a leader in providing paid family leave for families with babies, newly adopted or foster children, and seriously ill family members through the Temporary Caregiver Insurance (TCI) program. One of only 10 state based paid leave programs, TCI provides up to five weeks of partial (about 60%) wage replacement for workers who need to take time from their jobs to care for a new child or seriously ill family member.

Rhode Island offers the shortest paid family leave in U.S. Rhode Island's TCI provides a maximum of 5 weeks of paid family leave (scheduled to increase to 6 weeks in January 2023). This is the shortest length of any paid family leave policy in the country and **significantly less than the minimum 12 weeks of leave that researchers and medical professionals recommend** for new parents.

Adding 4 additional weeks would help many families. However, the lowest wage workers in the state often cannot take the leave they need and that they contribute to because they cannot afford basic living expenses without their full paycheck

Rhode Island's wage replacement during paid family leave is the lowest in U.S. Rhode Island's TCI wage replacement is currently at 60%, meaning that workers only receive up to 60% of their regular pay when on leave. This wage replacement is the lowest amongst all paid family leave policies in the country. **Expenses increase significantly when a new baby or child joins a family**, and families need their full paycheck to cover both their regular living expenses and to meet the needs of a baby.

Access to Rhode Island's paid family leave program is not equitable. The lowest-wage workers use the TCI program at lower rates than they contribute to it. Data shows that workers with the lowest incomes, less than \$20,000 per year, made up 38% of the people who contribute to the TDI/TCI fund, but only 30% of the people who file claims to take leave. With Rhode

Island's wage replacement at 60%, these workers may be unable to afford to take the paid leave they contribute to.

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.**

Taking at least 12 weeks of 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 efforts to ensure Rhode Island remains a leader in the nation in helping families.