

TESTIMONY

RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

To: House Labor Committee

From: Krisaki Liamas, Member, Women's Fund of RI Policy and Advocacy Committee

Date: Wednesday, April 9th, 2025

Re: Support of House Bill No. H-6066 (Giraldo) Paid Family Leave

My name is Krisaki Liamas, and I am writing today in **strong support of House Bill No. H-6066**, which strengthens Rhode Island's paid family leave policies through the Temporary Caregiver Insurance (TCI) and Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) programs. As an admissions counselor in higher education and a member of the Women's Fund of Rhode Island Policy and Advocacy Committee, I see firsthand how the lack of comprehensive and equitable paid leave policies disproportionately impacts women, working parents, and educators across our state.

Why Paid Family Leave Matters

Since 2014, Rhode Island has provided paid family leave through the TCI program, offering crucial support for families with newborns, newly adopted or foster children, and those caring for seriously ill loved ones. But the reality is, we are falling behind.

Last year, Right from the Start proudly helped secure an expansion to the program, increasing paid leave to seven weeks starting in January 2025 and eight weeks in January 2026. While this progress matters greatly, Rhode Island still offers the fewest weeks and the lowest wage replacement—only 60%—of any of the 14 states with a paid family leave program.

This year, the focus is on increasing the wage replacement rate, updating the definition of “family” to be more inclusive, and enabling self-employed workers to buy into the program. Paid family leave is not a luxury—it is an essential program that helps thousands of families each year, especially those welcoming new babies or navigating serious health crises.

Disparities in Access Must Be Addressed

Data from 2024 shows that while workers earning under \$30,000 per year made up 43% of those paying into the program, they accounted for only 16% of those able to use it. This shows how the current system is not equitable or accessible to the workers who need it most. Low-wage workers, single parents, and those without strong employer support often have no choice but to forgo leave because they can't afford the pay cut.

As someone working in higher education, I regularly interact with educators and staff who face these impossible decisions. And as a woman, I feel this reality deeply. At 34, I find myself hesitating to start a family—not because I don't want children, but because the cost of childcare,

limited paid leave, and systemic gender inequities make it feel unattainable. I know many women who share this same concern.

This Bill is a Step Toward Equity and Compassion

House Bill No. H-6066 offers a meaningful opportunity to make paid family leave in Rhode Island more effective and more equitable. By increasing the wage replacement rate and expanding access to include more types of families and workers, we can help ensure that no one has to choose between their paycheck and caring for a loved one.

I respectfully urge you to support this important legislation. Rhode Island families deserve better. Let's build a state where caregiving is valued, and where people—regardless of income or employment status—can take the time they need without risking their livelihood.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Krisaki Liamas

Member, Women's Fund of RI Policy and Advocacy Committee