

Written Testimony
Rhode Island General Assembly

To: House Labor Committee

From: Kristy Whitcomb, DrPH, CLC; Cranston Resident and LLC Business owner

Date: Date of hearing

Re: Support for H-6066, Paid Family Leave

I am writing in support of Right from the Start Campaign's priority to support Paid Family Leave, H-6066. While Rhode Island has approved increasing the number of weeks for paid family leave, the families that are eligible and would benefit from this are not accessing this benefit and likely due to the fact RI wage replacement rate is not enough for low-income families to actually take the leave. This is very concerning considering a newborn needs proper care including nutrition and this takes time to learn and establish routine. It is well known breastfeeding/pumping/providing human milk is the gold standard for infant nutrition, and this takes time to establish the infant feeding dyad and build connection. This is also very critical to infant development.

As someone who has birthed two children, with one having a several week NICU stay and the younger born only a year and half after, it was critical to have the time for myself along with my spouse's time. In addition to the infant feeding/breastfeeding and critical care checks for my children, there was also me – the birthing parent – and my own wellbeing and health. Postpartum is a critical time to support mental health and wellbeing – not being stressed regarding affording to live and having my husband with me was critical to managing post c-section care, postpartum mental health needs, my husband having the opportunity to connect with our children and, ensuring a plan was in place for high-quality and safe child care for when I would need to return to work. I recall reaching out for help with postpartum anxiety and depression and was told that unless I was suicidal or homicidal the wait (this was a few years ago) was at least 3 months. Without my spouse being home, I am not sure how I would have navigated hunting down a support that could help navigate the new world that was parenting multiple young children.

I want to thank you for reviewing my testimony. I strongly hope and wish this recommendation helps to pass the legislation.