

Dear Chairperson Corvese and members of the House Labor Committee:

My name is Claire Santoro and I live in Providence. I am writing to you today to urge you to **vote in favor of bill H-7968**.

I strongly support bill H-7968 because I know personally how critical it is to have twelve weeks of paid leave.

I moved to Rhode Island in 2021 while pregnant with my now-four-year-old son, Elliot. When I moved – in part *because* I moved during pregnancy – I transitioned from working full-time outside the home to working as an independent consultant. Now, four years later, I have my own LLC and am proud of the work that I do to provide sustainability support to mission-driven organizations. However, because I was self-employed at the time of Elliot's birth, I was not eligible for paid leave. My family's financial security depended on me continuing to work throughout the first months of Elliot's life. Fortunately, my husband was able to take TCI leave, and I was able to scale back my work to focus on the health of myself and baby Elliot.

My birth experience and the beginning of Elliot's life were relatively ordinary, but not easy. Elliot was born by unplanned C-section, a procedure responsible for upwards of 30% of births in Rhode Island. Because the procedure is major abdominal surgery, new mothers are advised to limit physical activity for many weeks to allow their bodies to heal. New mothers rarely see a doctor for a follow-up visit before six weeks postpartum. By eight weeks postpartum, mothers may have received clearance to return to pre-pregnancy activities, but their bodies are very much still recovering.

Eight weeks after birth, new mothers are waking every 2-3 hours at night to feed their growing babies. We are facing a roller coaster of hormonal shifts, possibly including postpartum anxiety or depression. Indeed, postpartum depression affected my ability to work after Elliot's birth, although I certainly tried to continue. Even during the day, new mothers are tied to their babies to breastfeed, or to the pump to produce breast milk, or to formula bottles in need of constant refilling and washing. It is a grueling time—rewarding, of course, but absolutely physically, mentally, and emotionally grueling.

This is the reality, not the exception, for new parents. Every mother and child, no matter how ordinary the birth, needs more than eight weeks. Twelve weeks of paid leave is the standard, and we should meet that in Rhode Island—for everyone, including workers who are self-employed.

Please vote in favor of bill H-7968. Rhode Island families are counting on you.

Sincerely,

Claire Santoro
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