

Re: Testimony in Support of H-7968

Dear Chairperson Corvese and members of the House Labor Committee:

I am Dr. Sylvie Le from Warwick, Rhode Island. I serve as the Clinic Director of Pelvic Health at Specialized Orthopedic Physical Therapy, where I work as a pelvic floor physical therapist. My clinical practice is dedicated to caring for women throughout their lives, including during pregnancy and the postpartum period.

I strongly support H-7968 because I see firsthand the physical consequences when women are forced to return to work before their bodies have adequately healed from childbirth.

Childbirth is a significant medical event that requires substantial recovery time. Despite this, many women in the United States return to work just weeks after delivery because they do not have access to sufficient paid maternity leave. In my clinical practice, I regularly treat postpartum patients who feel pressured to return to physically and mentally demanding work environments long before their bodies are ready. Once they return to work, many are no longer able to attend the physical therapy appointments that support their recovery due to the competing demands of work, childcare, and family responsibilities. As a result, women often lose access to the care that would help them heal properly, which can negatively impact both their short-term recovery and their long-term health.

From a medical standpoint, six weeks postpartum is not a full recovery—it is simply the earliest checkpoint at which many patients are medically re-evaluated. Research and clinical experience demonstrate that meaningful postpartum recovery takes much longer, up to one full year.

At six weeks postpartum, a woman's pelvic floor muscles are estimated to be only about 50% healed. These muscles play a critical role in bladder and bowel control, pelvic organ support, and core stability. It can take at least 12 weeks before these muscles regain sufficient function to support normal daily activities, and often longer when there has been significant tissue trauma during delivery.

For women who undergo cesarean delivery—which accounts for nearly one in three births in the United States—the recovery process is even more complex. A cesarean section is a major abdominal surgery that involves incisions through the abdominal wall, fascia, and uterus. Healing and rehabilitation of the abdominal wall and core musculature require several months to restore adequate strength and stability.

Additionally, the ligaments and connective tissues that support the pelvic organs and pelvic floor are significantly stretched during pregnancy and childbirth. These structures can take up to 12 to 18 months to fully recover their strength and integrity.

When women are required to return to work prematurely, before these structures have had adequate time to heal, the risk of long-term complications increases. Improper healing and untreated pelvic floor dysfunction can lead to chronic lower back and hip pain, pelvic pressure or heaviness, urinary incontinence, and pain with sexual intercourse. These conditions can significantly impact quality of life and may require months—or even years—of medical treatment and rehabilitation.

Providing longer paid maternity leave is not simply a benefit for mothers—it is an investment in the health and stability of families, workplaces, and communities. When women are given the time necessary to properly recover from childbirth, they are far more likely to return to work physically stronger, mentally healthier, and better able to perform their jobs safely and effectively. Conversely, forcing women to return to work before their bodies have healed increases the risk of chronic pain, pelvic floor dysfunction, and other long-term health conditions that can lead to decreased productivity, increased healthcare costs, and in some cases, women leaving the workforce altogether.

By supporting H-7968, Rhode Island has the opportunity to prioritize maternal health, strengthen families, and support a healthier and more sustainable workforce for the future. I respectfully urge you to support this bill and give Rhode Island families the support they deserve.

I strongly urge you to vote in favor of bill H-7968.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Sylvie Le

2 Tomahawk Court

Warwick, Rhode Island 02886