



**Testimony Re: H-5720 Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Rhode Island Parental and Family Medical Leave Act**  
**House Labor Committee**  
**March 1, 2021**  
**Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports House Bill 5720, which would update the state's landmark law, passed in 1987, a full 6 years before the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was signed into law in 1993.

The state law requires employers with 50 or more employees to provide at least 13 weeks of job protected leave over any 24-month period when they have a baby, when they are seriously ill, or to care for a serious ill family member. This leave can be paid or unpaid. The federal law requires employers to provide at least 12 weeks over any 12-month period.

Rhode Island remains a leader in the nation in requiring 13 weeks of job-protected leave, but we need to update our legislation by changing the period during which you can take the leave to every 12 months. This should not be a significant change for employers in Rhode Island since they already have to comply with the federal law.

This change would help Rhode Islanders who have two significant health or family leave needs in back-to-back years – such as having a spouse or parent with a serious illness in year one and having a baby in year two. It would also help families who have babies that are spaced closer than 24 months apart. FMLA would already provide some job-protection for these workers, but updating Rhode Island's law would enable some to take the extra week in year two if they needed it.

We are also working this year to expand the state's paid family leave program, Temporary Caregiver Insurance (TCI) to provide at least 12 weeks of paid leave for new parents and to increase the wage replacement rates to help lower-wage families actually be able to take the leave when needed.

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.