

S 0231: Related to Labor and Labor Relations—Temporary Disability Insurance

Testimony of Dr. Barbara Silver, Research Coordinator, URI Schmidt Labor Research Center, Co-Chair, URI Work-Life Committee

Before the Senate Committee on Finance

Good afternoon, members of the Senate Committee on Finance. I am Dr. Barbara Silver, Research Coordinator at URI's Schmidt Labor Research Center and the Co-Chair of URI's Work-Life Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you regarding RI's proposed Temporary Caregiving Bill.

The Schmidt Labor Research Center at URI is an independent, multidisciplinary unit devoted to the study and teaching of all aspects of work and employment. A primary focus of the Center and the URI Work-Life Committee is the study and promotion of policies and practices that contribute to work-life integration for our employees.

Work and Family are interdependent: in our present economy, especially, we are aware that families depend on work and workers to survive, but we less readily recognize that work depends on families, as well. Families bear and raise the next generation of taxpayers, workers, and they take care of present and past workers. Increasingly, corporations and institutions are realizing that the "breadwinner-caretaker" family model, where workers come to work unfettered by family responsibilities, is no longer the norm. Because nearly everyone is working today, and our population is rapidly aging, these companies and the rest of us must address the needs of working caregivers if we are to remain viable and competitive. Too often, we still tend to think of children and caregiving as private choices, rather than a public good in which we must invest. It is untenable and contradictory to support workers without supporting caregivers – today, they are one and the same.

Significant research shows that supporting working caregivers reaps economic rewards that benefit individual workers, families, businesses' bottom lines, the health care system, and ultimately, the Rhode Island state economy. Research also shows clearly that on the national level, people want and need family-friendly workplaces and more balance in their lives.

The University of Rhode Island has long understood this, and has been a strong supporter of paid family leave since 2005, when the University passed its own paid parental leave policy for faculty, and then for all employees not under state collective bargaining agreements. At URI, we recently surveyed all staff employees about their work-life needs and challenges. Representing a diverse subsample of the population, we suggest our findings reflect the experiences and desires of Rhode Island workers in general. Following are a few findings:

- Of a list of 15 work-life supports, after scheduling flexibility options, employees endorsed paid parental leave and a sick bank (to enable access to additional time off work if needed) as the most useful supports that could be offered URI employees.
- Half of all staff employees have (or anticipate having in the next 5 years) child care responsibilities. While the majority rely on family to assist with child care needs, the estimated annual total expenditures by the 1860 staff employees for child care is over \$1million. The majority of those with younger children who do not use child care do so because they cannot afford it.
- Fully one-third of URI staff employees currently have elder care responsibilities; 45% anticipate having them during the next 5 years, and another 15% aren't sure, meaning that perhaps over half of URI workers will be faced with elder care responsibilities soon. The large majority rely on family members for help; even so, the estimated total annual expenditures for URI employees is almost \$400,000.
- Demands of elder care can be especially stressful. Compared to non-elder caregivers, elder caregivers report more work-life conflict, stress, and sense of overwork. They also express less job satisfaction, lower commitment to the organization, and lower supervisory support for work-life challenges. These findings mirror national studies of workers, and we must find ways to support them.
- 13% of URI Staff are simultaneously caring for elders and children (15% nationally). This number is projected to increase over the next few decades.

The TCI bill does not just make good economic sense for Rhode Island. It is a CLASS equity issue as lower income workers have less access to flexible work schedules, less job security and fewer options when faced with caregiving challenges. It is GENDER equity issue, as women are still the predominant caregivers, and caregiving challenges can disproportionately impact their job security or advancement. It is a RACE/ETHNICITY issue, as white people are much less likely to assume care for an elderly relative compared to Asians, Hispanics, and African Americans.

Finally, Rhode Island can embrace another opportunity to continue in its role as a leader in New England and the nation by endorsing this legislation. Being one of the earliest states to pass breastfeeding in the workplace legislation in 2003, we see today that not only have at least 25 states followed suit, but so has the federal government. Likewise, as one of a tiny handful of countries in the world still without paid family leave, we believe Rhode Island can continue as a vanguard and help pave a similar path forward for working caregivers by passing this bill.