

To: Labor and Public Employees Committee Members of the Connecticut General Assembly:

I submit this testimony in my position as the President and Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Fund of Connecticut, a public charitable foundation, and its subsidiary, the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut (CHDI). Together the Children's Fund and CHDI work to improve the health, mental health and early care systems for children in Connecticut.

As you consider a system of paid family and medical leave in Connecticut, I would like to present information related to the lasting positive health and mental health outcomes associated with this smart policy. Paid family and medical leave promotes the bond between parents and their newborns and nothing could be more important in supporting healthy brain development at a critical time in an infant's development. Investing in the early years of a child's life helps them to reach his or her full potential, which in turn contributes to our state's shared economic and social vitality.

Secure Infant Attachment Leads to Healthier Children

One of the most compelling reasons for paid family leave is the research showing that secure infant attachment with a parent or other primary caregiver supports healthy brain development and leads to better life-long outcomes for children. Early experiences are fundamental to shaping the architecture of the brain, specifically through these early relationships. An infant's secure attachment is the primary source of a child's security, self-esteem, self-control and development of social skills. This attachment has implications for every phase of development that follows.

Neuroscience also suggests that young children's brains are negatively affected by adverse or traumatic events. Chronic exposure to these traumatic events can cause a response that is toxic and stresses the rapidly developing structure of the brain in the first three years of life. Without the powerful buffering effect of a nurturing caregiver, this early exposure to traumatic experiences, such as abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic or community violence, or prolonged separation, can have lifelong consequences for the child's physical and emotional well-being. The relationship with a nurturing, caring, consistent adult can make all the difference in reducing these effects.

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Research also shows that paid family and medical leave is associated with: higher breastfeeding rates, higher immunization rates, lower infant death rates, lower rates of postpartum depression in some women, better mental health and physical outcomes for new moms and increases in mothers' ability to interact with their babies.

United States Lags behind Other Nations

The United States is one of just three countries (of 185) that do not guarantee paid maternity leave. Currently the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) offers 12-16 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to recover from an illness or to care for a new baby or a sick family member. While 60 percent of the U.S. workforce is eligible for this benefit, millions of Americans cannot afford to take the FMLA unpaid leave, resulting in critical infant-parent bonding time being cut short.

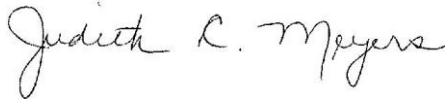
Connecticut Lags Behind Other States

Other states have already enacted paid family leave programs including: California, New Jersey, Rhode Island and recently, New York. Massachusetts may also pass legislation next year. States that have enacted paid family leave programs show positive or neutral impact on their businesses. After 10 years of paid leave in CA, employers report an increase in employee morale and productivity.

It is important that a paid family and medical leave system in Connecticut be affordable, accessible and provides adequate time for family care or healing. Investing in the early years of a child's life with policies that support the bond between parents and their newborns and mitigate circumstances that interrupt this attachment has positive outcomes that carry forward to adulthood and benefit everyone in our state.

We hope the Committee and Connecticut lawmakers will make paid family and medical leave a reality for all Connecticut workers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith R. Meyers".

Judith Meyers, Ph.D.
President and CEO
Children's Fund of Connecticut
Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut, Inc.