



## Testimony Re: H-7429 Educational/Child Care Involvement Leave

House Labor Committee

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice **strong support** for some of the parts of House Bill **and concerns** with other components. This bill would repeal existing “school involvement leave” requirements and replace them with new “educational/child care involvement leave” under the Rhode Island Parental and Family Leave Act.

First let me describe the elements that we support:

- Adding child care provider in addition to school as a program that requires parental involvement. The vast majority of children in Rhode Island have all parents in the workforce (73% of children under age 6 and 77% of children ages 6 through 17) and thousands of children are enrolled in child care, Head Start, and preschool. Child care is a core part of the state’s early education system and provides important educational opportunities after school and during the summer.
- Adding language that allows for time off to cover emergency situations at schools or child care programs that families cannot anticipate in advance or provide 24 hours notice for, including:
  - schools/programs that request a child be picked up immediately
  - absence from school or child care related to a behavioral or discipline problem (e.g. school/program suspensions or expulsions)
  - unexpected closure of the school or program (for example no heat, no electricity, burst pipe, etc.)
  - a natural disaster (e.g. snow, flood, hurricane closures)
- Adding language that specifically provides for time off for parents to find, enroll, or re-enroll their child in a school or child care program. This is a great addition since we want parents to research and visit child care programs and schools before they enroll their children.
- Increasing the number of hours of time off that can be used for school/child care involvement to 8 per month.

Our concerns are connected to the repeal of some important existing language:

- It is important to retain language which specifically allows parents time off to attend parent-teacher conferences, IEP meetings, and other important meetings with school or child care teachers, administrators, and support staff. It is also important to retain language that allows

parents time off to participate in school related activities which might include chaperoning a field trip, attending a performance or exhibition of their child's work, and other events that are designed to promote family engagement in their child's education.

- It is important to retain the specific provision that employees can take at least 10 hours of leave during any 12 months, regardless of whether their employer offers any paid time off. We would support an increased amount of time off per year. We are concerned with new language that suggests that providing leave without pay may be optional for employers.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown over many years in establishing the original RI Parental and Family Medical Leave Act and the current school involvement leave. More recently, the Rhode Island General Assembly has been a leader in passing legislation providing 4 weeks of paid family leave which is helping thousands of Rhode Island families take paid time off to welcome a new child into their family or to care for seriously ill family member. In 2017, the state was again a leader in passing earned sick leave which helps families take paid time off to care for a sick child or for preventive medical care appointments such as prenatal and well-baby appointments.

We would welcome the opportunity to work with Representative Carson and the sponsors to make improvements to this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

