



Testimony Re: H-7544, Relating to Labor and Labor Relations – Temporary Disability Insurance
House Labor Committee
March 29, 2017
Leanne Barrett, Senior Policy Analyst

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports House Bill 7544, which would expand the Temporary Caregivers Insurance Program to cover six weeks of leave beginning in 2019 and eight weeks of leave beginning in 2020. The bill will also make some important changes to improve the financing and wage replacement benefits for low-wage workers.

The Temporary Caregivers Insurance Program (TCI) was established as part of TDI in 2013 and provides 4 weeks of partial pay coverage when workers need to take time off to care for a new child including newly adopted and foster children or to care for a seriously ill child, spouse, parent, domestic partner or.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supported the creation of the TCI program which was launched in 2014. Many national organizations promoting child development support paid family leave, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, ZERO TO THREE (a national research organization focused on infants and toddlers), the Center for Law and Social Policy, the National Center for Children in Poverty, and the Surgeon General of the United States.

We support changes needed to the TCI program to increase the wage replacement amount to ensure that low-wage workers can take paid family leave for the recommended length of time to care for new children. We also support extending the length of paid family leave to cover at least eight weeks of leave.

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 **one year of paid family leave is recommended to optimize child health and well-being** and six months to promote maternal health and well-being.

Current Rhode Island child care regulations do not allow infants under age 6 weeks to be enrolled in child care. National health and safety guidelines published by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Public Health Association specify that **healthy, full-term infants should be at least 12 weeks old before they are enrolled in child care settings**. Because infants under three months old can become seriously ill very quickly without obvious signs, experts recommend that these young infants have minimal exposure to children and adults outside their family, including exposure to child care. Infants who are placed in child care before age 3 months are more likely to develop a serious infectious disease.

In 2017, there were 6,224 approved claims for Temporary Caregiver Insurance in Rhode Island. Of these, 80% were to care for a new child. Families from every city and town in Rhode Island participated. Of the 4,968 approved claims to bond with a new child, 98% were for a newborn child and 2% were for a newly adopted or foster child. Thirty-nine percent of claims to bond with a new child were filed by men and 61% were filed by women.

The basic, original TDI program is also a critical support for pregnant women and new mothers in Rhode Island. **In addition to the TCI claims in 2017, there were 3,326 approved TDI claims for disabling pregnancy complications and/or to**

recover from childbirth. Recovery from childbirth is a disabling condition covered by TDI. Women who do not have adequate wage replacement through a short-term disability insurance program may not be able to take needed time off from work to ensure the health and well-being of their baby and themselves.

Research indicates that **low wage workers are less likely to take unpaid leave or paid leave that does not provide adequate wage replacement** because they need steady income in order to meet their basic needs of housing and food. The changes proposed in this bill would help low wage workers take the recommended time off to care for newborn and newly adopted and foster children.

Taking 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 leadership in establishing the TDI and TCI programs and urges passage of this bill that would make improvements, extending leave periods to meet national recommendations and improving participation for low-wage workers.