

Testimony in Support
Senate Bill 19-188 – Family Medical Insurance Program (FAMLI)
March 19, 2019

Family caregivers are the most important source of support to newborn babies, foster/adopted children, the sick and the elderly. Currently, family leave is underutilized because many families can't afford to take unpaid leave.¹ When new mothers and fathers are encouraged to stay at home through paid family leave, bonding with their children is increased which translates into improved social and educational outcomes for their children.² For mothers, the median duration of breast feeding doubles.³ This increase in breast feeding is one of the factors that may contribute to significantly improved infant mortality and maternal health observed with paid family leave.⁴⁻⁷ Postpartum depression is reduced for women provided 12 or more weeks of paid family leave.⁸ Children's health in elementary school improves with the introduction of paid family leave.⁹ Family caregivers also play a pivotal role in delaying and preventing nursing home entry of their older relatives.¹⁰ In California, paid family leave was demonstrated to reduce nursing home usage by 11%.¹¹ It is because of these attributes of paid family leave that it can translate into cost savings through reduction in social services costs, educational costs, SNAP costs, medical insurance costs, Medicaid /Medicare costs, business productivity loss and employee retention.

Colorado is one of three states that allows abortion through the third trimester as well as physician assisted suicide. Most Coloradans would agree that it is reasonable for us to do everything we can to make them unnecessary. It is well known that financial circumstances are one of the primary reasons for the decision to pursue abortion.¹²⁻¹³ Seventy three percent of women say that they can't afford a baby and this is the driving reason to pursue abortion for 40%. Paid Family Leave would mitigate this problem and likely contribute to decreasing abortion rates. At the other end of the life continuum, one of the primary reasons that terminal patients choose suicide is the loss of independence and the fear of becoming a burden on family.¹⁴⁻¹⁵ 49% of Oregon and 52% of Washington assisted suicide prescribing physicians cite fear of becoming a burden on family as an important reason for their patients to choose suicide over natural death.¹⁴⁻¹⁵ By comparison, in California where 6 week paid family leave is available, only 21% of patients prescribed lethal overdoses under the assisted suicide program cited being a burden on family/friends as a rationale.¹⁶ Consequently, there is reason to believe that if we make it easier for family caregivers to take paid leave, the care they could provide to their terminally ill loved ones could reduce the demand for assisted suicide.

Finally, without paid leave, the only people who could afford to stay at home with their new baby, refrain from trying to work while sick, or care for elderly/sick/dying family members are those Coloradans who are wealthy or the minority that have existing paid leave benefits. This places a regressive, undue burden on the lower income members of our society. Please vote yes on this life affirming, and ultimately, cost saving bill.

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