
SUPPORTING THOSE WHO SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES

Testimony on Senate Bill 479 for the Pennsylvania Senate Committee on Labor and Industry

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About PathWays PA:

PathWays PA began in 1978 as the Women's Association for Women's Alternatives, one of Pennsylvania's first residential programs to keep low-income, vulnerable women together with their children. It has grown to become one of the Greater Philadelphia region's foremost providers of residential and community-based services with a focus on serving women, teens and children. Each year PathWays PA serves nearly 5,000 clients with a full complement of social services; job training and employment assistance; as well as residential programs. More information is available at www.pathwayspa.org.

PathWays PA would like to commend the Senate Labor and Industry Committee for holding hearings to discuss the need for Family and Medical Leave as depicted in SB 479, “Joanne’s Law.” Speaking for ourselves and for the Coalition for Healthy Families and Workplaces, we strongly support this bill and look forward to seeing it pass out of committee and come before the full Senate chamber.

Under the Family and Medical Leave Act, certain workers may take up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave to care for themselves, their spouse, parents, or children. Businesses are required to hold the employee’s job during that time. When it is a sibling, grandparent, or grandchild that falls ill or is injured, workers do not have the same protections, and therefore must choose between caring for a loved one and potentially losing their jobs.

When family members provide care, they willingly give up far more than their time. In many cases, workers who take care for others must also sacrifice their income, their savings, and even their homes.

In 2009, half of working caregivers reported spending all or most of their savings on caregiving expenses.

That same year, 1 in 5 family caregivers had to move in with a loved one due to the financial crisis – the same number, incidentally, that have needed to take a leave of absence from their work.¹

The question we are here to ask today is: must caregivers continue to give up their job security as well? The answer, of course, is no – Joanne’s Law can provide a simple, commonsense protection for workers who are giving up everything they have to do the right thing for their loved ones.

It is important to recognize the need for family caregivers in Pennsylvania, especially those outside the home. According to the Census, nearly 1.5 million Pennsylvanians live alone, and another 300,000 live in non-family households.² These adults have few options for family care during an illness under the present law.

As our population ages, it becomes more likely that parents will not be available to take part in any care that is needed. Instead, family members such as siblings and even grandchildren will be needed to pick up essential services – and they are already doing so. Nationally, more than 1/4th of family caregivers don’t qualify as family under FMLA guidelines, including siblings (3 percent of caregivers) and grandparents (7 percent).³

Extending the definition of FMLA to siblings increases the likelihood that someone will be there to care for sick or injured individuals, ensuring less of a strain on the health care system. Family caregivers already play a vital role in saving money for Pennsylvania’s businesses and healthcare systems, with over 1.26 million “informal” caregivers tending to others in the Commonwealth. This includes 234,000 grandparents who live with their grandchildren, over a third of whom are responsible for their grandchildren’s care.⁴

¹ Caregiver Statistics. (2016, November 04). Retrieved from <http://caregiveraction.org/statistics/#Economics of Caregiving>

² U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). B11016 - HOUSEHOLD TYPE BY HOUSEHOLD SIZE Universe: Households more information 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

³ *Updating the Family and Medical Leave Act*. (2016, June). Retrieved <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/fmla/Updating-the-fmla.pdf>

⁴ Caregiving Across the States: 50 State Profiles (2014). (2014, October 15). Retrieved from <https://www.caregiver.org/caregiving-across-states-50-state-profiles-2014>

If we put a monetary value on informal caregiving services in Pennsylvania – ignoring the intangible benefits of having a supportive family member participate in care during illness, such as faster recovery time – it would add up to over \$13.4 billion worth of care per year.⁵

Without a family member to provide care, Pennsylvanians will spend more time in a hospital, nursing facility, or hospice. While these facilities are all designed to care for those who are sick, they cannot replace the presence and care of a family member during serious illnesses, and they certainly cannot provide care at such a low cost. In-home care also remains the preferred method of care for many patients and their caretakers.

In summary, Joanne’s Law gives Pennsylvania’s workers the ability to care for their family members without fear of job loss while saving money in our communities. We look forward to taking any questions, and hope that you pass this bill with a favorable vote.

⁵ Caregiving Across the States: 50 State Profiles (2014). (2014, October 15). Retrieved from <https://www.caregiver.org/caregiving-across-states-50-state-profiles-2014>