

Dear representatives:

Thank you for the opportunity to share written testimony in support of paid family and medical leave. I am an assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics, Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases and a member of Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity. I am also a physician-scientist trained in adult and pediatric infectious diseases and a researcher at the University of Minnesota studying respiratory viral infections.

In my practice, I care for children who are sickened by infections. Many of these children can be cared for at home. However, this usually means staying home from daycare or school, and that means a parent or guardian must be available to take care of them. For some Minnesotans, this is an inconvenience but something they can accommodate. However, for many of the low-income families I care for, staying home with a sick child might mean the loss of a job or wages that are required to pay the rent or put food on the table. The situation can be even worse if a child is hospitalized. I care for children undergoing treatment for cancer who can be hospitalized for months at a time. The hospital can be a scary place for anyone, but certainly is for a child. It is critical for them to have a parent there to comfort them, participate in discussions with the medical team and advocate for them. Paid Family and Medical Leave would make it possible for all parents, not just the wealthy, to be present to support their children. These children are the future of our state. They are next generation of nurses, doctors, farmers, teachers, engineers and scientists. Surely, they deserve to have their parents and caregivers present at time when they need them the most.

Paid Family and Medical Leave is not only beneficial for the individual who takes the leave but is also a benefit to the larger community because of the reduced risk of spreading infectious diseases. Many of my patients work in jobs in which they directly interact with the public—restaurant employees, grocery clerks and housekeepers to name a few. Under our current system, they often do not have the option to stay home when they are sick. By coming to work sick, they not only put their own health at risk but the health of dozens or even hundreds of people visiting those businesses. Paid Family and Medical Leave is a benefit to the whole community by allowing people to stay home when they are sick and avoid spreading infections to their co-workers and customers.

The COVID19 pandemic has made abundantly clear that we are all vulnerable to infectious diseases and other medical problems. We all want to be able to do what is necessary to keep ourselves and our families safe and healthy. For this reason, I ask that you support legislation providing Paid Family and Medical Leave for all Minnesotans. We are one of the wealthiest states in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. We have the resources to provide this support for all Minnesotans if we just have the will to make it happen.

Thank you.

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