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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF A.3870-B / S. 3004-B: The Paid Family Leave Insurance Act

TO: Members of the Workforce Development Joint Budget Hearing
FROM: Sili Recio, Organizer, MomsRising
DATE: February 1st, 2016

Members of the Workforce Development Joint Budget Hearing, thank you for holding a hearing on The Paid Family Leave Insurance Act (A.3870-B / S. 3004-B). On behalf of the over 90,000 members of MomsRising in New York, we urge you to give S. 3004-B a favorable report.

Melissa, a MomsRising member from New York recently shared this story with us:

Having no paid maternity leave from my waitressing job threw my husband and I into financial chaos. It was so stressful- on top of having a newborn, not even knowing how we were going to make what little savings we had last, having to stress about buying diapers and basic survival items. We had tried to save as much as we could before I stopped working but what should have been a very joyful time with a learning curve of new parenthood, was a very desperate time financially.

And then there's Christina's story from Mechanicsville, NY:

After the birth of my son, I had 6 weeks of disability pay and NO other paid benefits with which to pay my bills. I worried every day that the financial strain would be too much for our young family and actually begged my boss if to allow me to come back earlier than I had originally planned. This was definitely not an ideal situation, and likely contributed to my postpartum depression. I was fortunate enough to have a full time job with benefits before the birth of my daughter, however, so I was able to focus on my baby rather than finances. Not surprisingly, I had a much less stressful (and longer) maternity leave -- which made it easier to establish breastfeeding and a pumping regime before returning to work full time.

Finally, there's Kit's story from Jeffersonville, NY:

Without paid family leave my wife and I, with our first child, worked alternate shifts to ensure our daughter was never without one of us. This also served the secondary purpose of minimizing the daycare bill. Breastfeeding was not even a question since she went back to work within the week. I worked 1st shift, she worked 2nd shift and we both slept 3rd shift. With our second daughter my wife took unpaid leave and ultimately stayed home because as a Nurse Aide she made less than the daycare bill. I eventually found a living wage job but it was tough for the first year. Thankfully when our third was born I had a good job but we were definitely worse off and had less time as a family unit because of the lack of paid leave. Mind you we had the finances for her to stay home with the children because I was working 75+ hours per week. Things are better now that I managed to go back and complete my college education but the first ten years of parenting were more difficult without paid leave.

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Unfortunately, these New Yorkers' stories are not uncommon in the United States, the only industrialized country *in the world* without a national paid leave policy.

Only 13 percent of Americans have access to paid family leave through their employers. Yes, the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows some employees to take up to 12 weeks of job-protected (but unpaid) leave. But FMLA only covers about 60 percent of employees. Further, many people who *are* eligible to take FMLA can't *afford* to take it, because it's unpaid.

That's the bad news.

Here's the good news: We can change this and New York can help lead the way by establishing a state paid family leave insurance program.

For the first time in history, women comprise half of the paid labor force, three-quarters of moms are in the labor force, and the majority of families need two working parents to make ends meet. This, and the fact that over 80 percent of women in our nation have children by the time they are 44, add up-so you can see why New York must prioritize paid family leave, like our MomsRising members do.

Whether it's to care for a newborn you swear already smiles, a mom who is ill, or a spouse battling cancer, being there for family is what matters. You shouldn't have to give up a paycheck to do it. It's time for paid family leave.

Thank you for your time and again, we urge a favorable vote on S. 3004-B.