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Dear Members of the Workforce Development Joint Budget Hearing,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for a strong paid family leave program in New York State. My name is Rachael Lerner and I am a practicing Women's Health Nurse Practitioner testifying on behalf of Nurse Practitioners of New York (NPNY), a member of the New York State Paid Family Leave Campaign. Nurse Practitioners of New York is a New York City based organization whose members, as health care professionals, advocate for accessible, affordable and high quality health care and provide continuing education. Our organization is a group member of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, the largest national NP organization representing approximately 205,000 NPs around the country. We are quite pleased that meaningful Paid Family Leave is in the limelight in New York as well as nationally. This legislation is long overdue.

My patients and their families struggle with navigating time away from work in a very vulnerable time in their lives- a breast cancer diagnosis. I had the privilege to care for a young woman in her late 30s who felt a mass in her breast a month earlier. She had such a demanding work schedule that she put off having the ultrasound for a couple of weeks. She then came to our office a week after a biopsy confirmed it was her worst fear- breast cancer. While scheduling further appointments, including labwork, cardiology and plastic surgery appointments, and scheduling surgery, it became obvious she and her husband became increasingly distressed. I found their main source of distress was for surprising reasons--- Not so much the breast cancer diagnosis and appointments, but caused by their concerns surrounding the care of their 2 young children. They had child care in place, but with an extended leave their disability benefits would not be sufficient to cover the costs of their existing childcare within the metropolitan area, and other fixed expenses. Her husband was also concerned that if they interrupted childcare, his wife would not have the physical support needed to even lift their young children while she would recover for surgery for at least 6-8 weeks. Envision trying to reason with a screaming toddler because you cannot pick them up. Now envision a screaming toddler crying and you physically aren't capable of picking them up because you're recovering from surgery and you're the only adult around because your partner can't take time off because they are concerned about losing their job if they do so. This makes me cringe. Not only because I have a 21 month old and a crying toddler is often my reality but when he cries and yells "Up, Up" there is nothing more I want than to dry his tears and be able to care for him. No one should have to choose between caring for their loved ones or keeping their job.

I had the recent unpleasant opportunity of navigating the paid family leave system caring for my newborn son. Even as an educated, working individual, the process onerous, complicated, and time consuming, taking me well over 20 hours total to navigate. I found repeated contact with the insurance companies, overworked human resource departments and managers tedious, laborious and complex. My son was born with an ocular mass that required surgery when he was only a few months old. While on

leave I had to coordinate appointments with specialists, recover from a cesarean birth, and care for a newborn, and breastfeed. I had the time to meet and speak with new parents. We joked about breastfeeding, which baby carrier or swaddle works best, and laughed about different apps on our phones that can track everything including the amount of dirty diapers our babies had. Often these conversations eventually led to, "Are you going back to work?" and "Did you have paid time off?" What has remained one of the most vivid memories are the jokes we shared about moving to another country where support for new parents is abundant and respect for a growing family is shown with provisions of paid family leave. Some of us went far enough to investigate communities in Canada and the Netherlands where both parents were supported in staying home with the baby. Some of us wondered if we would be better off not working at all here in the United State and going on public assistance because at least then we would have time with our babies at a very vulnerable stage.

Research demonstrates women who take paid leave after a child's birth are more likely to be employed at 9-12 months after the child's birth than working mothers who take no leave. If a woman is forced to leave her job or take unpaid leave, as a consequence, it becomes a necessity to turn to public assistance. According to Dube & Kaplan's *Paid Family Leave in California: An Analysis of Costs and Benefits*, strong paid family leave can decrease reliance on public assistance, in turn creating significant taxpayer savings. Right now, the Temporary Disability Insurance benefit of \$170 per week is far too low to protect workers from financial hardship. Grocery bills alone could come close to \$170 per week for a small family. I cannot imagine having to solely rely on this amount to cover all my bills in the year 2016.

Just as these new parents swaddle and protect their baby in warm blankets, we as a society should swaddle and protect the entire family within a blanket of security and with the knowledge and comfort in the wisdom that their most important job is highly valued by our society. This respect should be demonstrated by state and federal provisions that mandate a well paid leave so that every priceless newborn gets off to a beginning that is secure and stress free and filled with welcoming hugs from community and family alike.

My colleagues in the New York State Paid Family Leave Campaign provided thorough research that demonstrates the benefits of a strong Paid Family Leave. I urge you to support a strong family leave program. I am astonished that in 2016, this is not a federal benefit. As a consequence, New York must be only among a handful of other states that understand strong paid family leave is not only fiscally responsible- it is humane. When we are stripped of our social statuses, professions, and stratifications, we are all human. Let us improve the human experience. The time is now for New York to take a stand. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Sincerely,

Rachael

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