



Written Testimony
Small Necessities Leave Act

Submitted by:
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Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on this important issue. While many would benefit from the Small Necessities Leave Act, I will focus my testimony on two specific subject areas relating to short term leave: the benefit to women and the benefit to parents/guardians of students with disabilities. Through my work at The Fund for Women and Girls, a Chester County nonprofit, that works towards gender equity through advocacy and grantmaking, and as a working parent of a child with multiple disabilities, I can speak both professionally and personally to the importance of such a law in Pennsylvania.

The Fund for Women and Girls (The Fund) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit serving Chester County, Pennsylvania and beyond. Our mission is simple: “The Fund for Women and Girls leads and unites the community through philanthropy and advocacy to ensure that women and girls have the resources and opportunities to thrive”. Through grantmaking, we provide funding for local nonprofits that provide direct services benefiting women and girls. We have several advocacy programs that support changing policy, practice, and culture around women’s issues. We seek to meet the immediate real needs and at the same time, address the root causes that create these needs.

One of the advocacy components of The Fund’s work is our [Blueprint Report](#). The Fund’s Blueprint Report is the first and only comprehensive needs assessment of women and girls in Chester County. Published every five years since 2005, the Blueprint Report highlights pressing issues facing women and girls at the local, state, and national levels, with a deep dive on conditions in Chester County. This report compiles critical information to guide funding and programming and looks longitudinally at the progress. Unfortunately, more often than not, there is a lack of progress, in the outcomes of women and girls. In addition to our Blueprint Report, to keep ourselves grounded in the needs of those most impacted by systemic and institutional sexism, we take a very hands-on approach to ensure we are listening to those voices. Through focus groups and listening sessions, we prioritize



understanding what the barriers and opportunities are for women and girls throughout our region. We do this in partnership with educational institutions and other nonprofits in Chester County.

As the Director of Advocacy and Policy at The Fund, I have created and facilitate all of our advocacy programs, assist with communications and education around the issues, provide trainings and presentations, and work with local and state legislators to support policy that will positively change outcomes for women and girls in Chester County and throughout the Commonwealth. Through my full-time job I work to address the systemic issues that women and girls face not only locally, but state-wide.

In addition to my professional experience, I am a working mother of two. My 20-year-old son has multiple disabilities and has been fortunate enough to receive school-based services from age 2 through graduation. He has also relied on Medical Assistance (Medicaid) and from ages 2-12 received home-based Medicaid funded services in addition to the private therapies and interventions my husband and I were thankfully able to provide. Prior to my role at The Fund, I was an Educational Advocate, providing support and services to families who had children with disabilities that needed educational support. Additionally, I am registered with Chester County Intermediate Unit as an Educational Surrogate. In this role, I support students who were wards of the state in a state funded facility (typically students who were either in residential treatment facilities or who were adjudicated). An Educational Surrogate has legal rights exclusively for the education of the student and is the individual responsible for ensuring that students' interests are being represented during educationally related meetings. All of this to say, I know firsthand how challenging it can be to be working and trying to meet the needs of your child with special education needs. I experienced it personally and saw it time and time again with my clients. The ability to attend meetings and meaningfully engage in the process can make or break a student's educational outcomes.

Why is this a women's issue?*

Disproportionate caregiving responsibilities. Women still fill the majority of caretaking roles in families, be it care for young children, aging parents, or children/family members with disabilities. Within these roles comes doctors' appointments, school meetings, and agency management. While some individuals are fortunate enough to have an employer that understands and will grant leave without their job being threatened, that is not the case for everyone.

- Single female-led households with children in PA: 235,549 in 2024 (compared to single male led households: 60,710)
- Grandparents, predominantly grandmothers (Around 63% of grandparents responsible for core resident grandchildren are women, and historically, grandmothers lead in sole-custody situations), account for caregiving for 65,256 minors in PA in 2024



- Percentages vary depending on different factors, but women hold between 70-80% of care-giving roles as of 2024
- “New Census Bureau data reveals that in just the first two weeks of 2023, 6.8 million adults were unable to work because they were caring for a child or an elderly relative.”

Healthcare. Women are more likely to require short term leave for medical, reproductive health (like pregnancy), and chronic health conditions. While these medical needs may not require an extended leave of absence from work, the ability to attend doctors' appointments ensures proper medical care and also can prevent needs from worsening.

- Women spend 25 percent more time in “poor health” relative to men – accessing care is a critical component to this gap
- “Data supplied by the U.S. Department of Labor, found women say they need more leave in comparison to men (24% vs. 17%) and take more leave from work for a family or medical reason (18% vs. 14%), yet more women than men still have unmet need for leave (9% vs. 6%).”

Closing the gender wage and gender care gap. Income inequity persists today. So often women are faced with choosing between work and family or medical/safety self-care. Years of inadequate workplace policies and cultural expectations have resulted in women earning less than men. Access to leave allows for continued access to the labor force, helping women maintain earnings, benefits, and career progression. **States that have policies, such as short-term leave, have lower gender wage gaps than states, like Pennsylvania, that do not.** Normalizing practices and policies that support caregivers positively impacts not only the outcomes for the employee, but for the business and overall culture in the workforce.

- In 2024, women working full-time year-round made 80.9 cents per dollar earned by men — a significant worsening of the gender earnings ratio compared to 82.7 cents per dollar in 2023.
- Latina women make 54 cents per dollar and at the current rate of improvement will not have equal pay for more than 150 years
- In 2024 in PA, the median annual income for a full time employed white male was \$67,530, while the median annual income for a full time employed Latina was \$40,000.
- Black women earn 64.6 cents to the dollar of white men in 2024.
- The vast majority of Black mothers—over 80 percent—are primary breadwinners. Research finds that six out of 10 Black women either don’t take the leave or do so without pay, costing them \$3.9 billion in lost wages *each* year.
- Policies, like short term paid leave, have been shown to decrease the gender wage gap by making retaining employment (and the benefits therein) more accessible to caregivers.



Working women in caregiving roles face challenges maintaining employment and advancing in their careers. This results in lost economic benefit to the state, stagnant improvement in the gender wage gap, and poorer health outcomes due to inadequate healthcare.

* The focus on women for the purpose of this testimony is not to ignore the potential benefit that these policies could have for men, but to emphasize the comparatively disproportionate need for the policy for women. In line with the belief at The Fund that by addressing the needs of those most impacted by the issues, everyone is positively impacted.

Why is this a disability issue?*

Managing medical and support needs. Individuals with disabilities may require frequent medical appointments, therapies, evaluations, or emergency care. Short-term leave allows caregivers to attend these appointments, coordinate services, and respond to urgent needs without risking job loss or disciplinary action.

- The number of people over the age of 64 in PA is 2,539,054 (this does not include 60–63year-olds that are included in the current legislation)
- More than 1 in 4 (26%) adults in PA have a disability – equaling 2,750,663 people
- In 2023, the number of PH-95 children enrolled in the Medical Access Program in Pennsylvania was 88,603.

Participation in special education needs. One of the single greatest factors in the outcome of a student receiving special education services is participation of a parent/guardian. While IEP meetings are mandated to occur annually, they can be held as needed. In addition to IEP meetings, students may need to be evaluated or re-evaluated, receive intervention outside of school time, have services provided in the home, and more.

- In the 2022-2023 school year, there were 357,917 (19.3%) students (age 3-21) receiving special education services, an increase from the previous year's total of 313,618 (18.6%).
- Families of children with special education needs lose an average of \$18,000 annually.
- While no formal studies could be found regarding how many IEP meetings are held per student, per year, it is not uncommon to have more than the one required meeting per year. One estimate holds 3-5 meetings as the average number of meetings held.

Maintaining employment and income stability. Without access to leave, caregivers may be forced to reduce hours, take unpaid time off, or leave the workforce entirely. Short-term leave supports job retention. This helps caregivers maintain income, health insurance, and other employment benefits that are often essential for families affected by disability. **When policies mandate employee support, workplace culture improves as employee satisfaction**



improves. This leads to an increase in productivity, as seen in other states with policies like short-term leave. Employee support **benefits are often only available to those who also typically are in higher income professions.**

- Of these 63 million caregivers, 59 million were caring for someone over 18.
- Studies of the gender wage gap and related policies show overwhelmingly that women who have access to paid leave benefits see great increases to personal salary, more opportunities for professional advancement, and lowered rates of completely exiting the workforce.
- These economic outcomes positively impact the whole economy, in addition to the employee and employer.

Addressing inequities. Caregivers of individuals with disabilities are disproportionately women and people with lower incomes, who often have fewer workplace protections. Additionally, people of color disproportionately hold these lower income positions. Short-term leave helps reduce these disparities by providing a baseline level of support regardless of job type or employer willingness to provide benefits.

- 1 in 4 U.S. adults (63 million) are caring for an adult or child with a complex medical condition or disability.
- The number of caregivers in PA for Alzheimer's patients alone: 465,000
- “People of color who provide care to family members tend to be younger and more likely to be employed than white caregivers, which means they may face greater conflicts between work and family.”

Reducing reliance on crisis and social systems. When caregivers cannot take time off, manageable issues can escalate into crises requiring emergency medical care or institutional support. Leave policies help caregivers address needs early, benefiting families and reducing strain on public systems that are already beyond capacity with need. These very systems are increasingly being challenged by more and more individuals and families qualifying for services, as a result of inadequate policy structures and lack of necessary funding.

Ensuring that individuals with disabilities can get the medical and educational care that they need not only benefits them and their families, but also society as a whole. When appropriately supported, the need for social services decreases, work can be maintained for caregivers, and educational outcomes improve with increased engagement.

* While the statistics and anecdotes included in this testimony speak to the existing reality of individuals and caretakers with disabilities, it is important to recognize that the category of

“disability” could apply to anyone and change at any time. Understanding that this issue could impact every single person is important.

Legislative considerations (in addition to comments made in the accompanying addendum):

- “Who” qualifies
 - Consider adding domestic violence survivors as an allowable category. Allowing for that additional qualification can provide necessary support during a challenging time. Survivors often have to deal with court cases, child custody challenges, and legal issues such as obtaining a protection from abuse order.
- Process for requesting time off – for employers who do not currently offer paid time off, guidance for processes would be beneficial and increase the likelihood of compliance
- Process for reporting violations of the law – clearly outline the process or link to related existing statute
- Considerations for paid vs unpaid
 - Paid is ideal, as many of the employees who do not already have access to paid time off are employed in lower-wage positions.
 - Unpaid is better than nothing. Many caregivers cannot currently access the benefits of paid time off but still need and have the ability to utilize time off.
- Consider what education of the general public would look like if this bill were to pass.

In conclusion, policies such as the Small Necessities Leave Act have been shown in other states to positively impact both employees and employers. These policies begin to address the historical and institutionalized consequences of sexism, racism, ableism, as well as gender and race-based employment segregation. As outlined, there is substantial research and data that supports the need for policies like this to improve outcomes for employees. Pennsylvania is facing an aging workforce, and the surrounding states, specifically New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware, all have more robust employee protection and support laws. Pennsylvania is losing its workforce due to antiquated approaches to employment policy. Passing the Small Necessities Leave Act would be an important step in the right direction for all Pennsylvanians.

Resources cited and for additional information:

- Lean In / McKinsey and Company [“Women in the Workplace 2025” report](#)
- Institute of Women’s Policy Research [“Gender Wage Gap Fact Sheet 2025”](#)
- Institute of Women’s Policy Research [“Latina Equal Pay Day Fact Sheet 2025”](#)
- Study: [“Children With Special Health Care Needs and Forgone Family Employment”](#)
- Report: [“2022-2023 Special Education Statistical Summary”](#) for Pennsylvania



- US Census Bureau Report [Single Parent Data](#)
- US Census Bureau Report [Age Data](#)
- [Alzheimer's Caregivers Report 2024](#)
- CDC Report 2023 [“Disability & Health U.S. State Profile Data for Pennsylvania \(Adults 18+ years of age\)”](#)
- Study: [“Gender Differences in Caregiving”](#)
- Report: [“Closing the Women’s Health Gap”](#)
- Study: [“Women’s Health and Working Life”](#)
- Report: [“How Employer Leave Policies Can Support Women’s Health”](#)
- Fact Sheet [“Paid Leave Will Help Close the Gender Wage Gap”](#)
- [“America’s Lack of Paid Leave is Devastating Women and Families”](#)
- Report: [“Crisis for Caregivers”](#)
- Report: [“Caregiving in the US”](#)
- 2023 PA DHS Report: [“Medical Access PH-95 Statistics”](#)
- Report [“Female Face of Family Caregiving”](#)