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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 5283, AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE

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Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Tercyak and the esteemed members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Tamara Kramer and I am a Policy Analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services. CAHS is a proud member of the CT Campaign for Family Values at Work, a group of diverse advocates who represent the needs of working families to care for themselves or a loved one in the event of a serious health condition or the birth, the adoption of a new child, or the need to provide care to an injured or recovering member of the military.

I am here today to testify in strong support of House Bill 5283, An Act Concerning Expansion of Family Medical Leave.

This legislation, which adds adds parent-in-law, sibling, grandparent, and grandchild to the list of family members for whom an employee may take leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), recognizes the need for flexibility in the statute and the importance of family caregivers. We urge you, as you consider this bill today, to add other family member categories to the statute's reach – including next of kin, and/or a person for whom you serve as guardian or conservator. This legislation would help reaffirm our state's position as a leader in family-friendly workplace policies, which are a critical in attracting quality workers to the state.

Due to the aging of the population and workforce, the number of workers with eldercare responsibilities is on the rise. Research shows that nationally 42% of workers have provided eldercare in the past five years and that almost half the workforce (49%) anticipates they will need to provide this support in the next five years.¹ Here in Connecticut, where we have a population of just over 3.5 million, we have an estimated 486,000 caregivers providing 465 million hours of care.² This service was valued at \$58.5 billion in 2009.³ These caregivers are often invisible in the care process, yet they bear huge responsibilities in providing for our state's elderly. FMLA is an important support for these working caregivers, and it is critical that we continue to revisit this legislation to ensure that it is addressing the needs of families as the demand for relative care grows.

Beyond FMLA: Supporting Family Medical Leave Insurance

¹ Lynn Feinberg, "What does Research Tell Us About Family Caregiving and Work?" AARP Public Policy Institute, January 16, 2014.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

The Family Medical Leave Act, which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2013, is an important protection for men and women who need time to care for themselves or family members without the fear of losing their jobs. As of 2012, FMLA had been used more than 100 million times,⁴ helping 35 million people keep their jobs and health insurance while they cared for a family health crisis or a new baby.⁵ However, only 59% of all employees in the U.S. are eligible to take leave under FMLA.⁶ To qualify for FMLA protections an employee must be working for an employer with 50 or more employees, work at least 1,250 hours a year, and have been on the job for at least a year. In addition, even if an employee is eligible for FMLA, many cannot afford to take unpaid leave. In fact, 78% of eligible workers who needed to take leave and did not said the reason was that they could not afford to go without wages.⁷

This underutilization highlights the need for further protection for our state's workers. The United States is one of the very few industrialized nations with no paid family leave. Benefits of a paid family leave system (also known as Family and Medical Leave Insurance, or FMLI) include: stronger labor force attachment, positive changes in wages, and lower use of public assistance. FMLI would ensure a worker does not risk his own job and wellbeing for being ill or for taking care of a family member. Last session this Committee recognized the benefits of such a system and championed a bill that created a task force to study the issue of Family Medical Leave Insurance, and how FMLI could work here in Connecticut. The task force has been charged with issuing recommendations to this committee by October 1, 2014. We urge you to review these recommendations, and to continue to work with this task force, to ensure that in the future Connecticut is not a state where a worker is punished for starting a family, being ill, or taking care of a relative.

I thank you for your consideration and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

⁴ "Expecting Better: A State-by-State Analysis of Laws That Help New Parents," National Partnership for Women & Families, May 2012.

⁵ "Family and Medical Leave: Making Time for Family Is Everyone's Business, Future of Children", May 2011.

⁶ "Family and Medical Leave in 2012: Executive Summary", Department of Labor and ABT Associates, September 7, 2012. Updated September 13, 2013.

⁷ "State Paid Leave Fund: Critical Support for Families and States", National Partnership for Women & Families, February 2012.