



State Representative

Allison Russo

Sponsor Testimony for House Bill 491

House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee

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Chair Manchester, Vice-Chair Cutrona, Ranking Member Denson, and Members of the House Families, Aging, and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 491, which would ensure that Ohioan's working families have the opportunity to care for a sick family member or take care of a new child without fear of losing their employment or financial instability.

Ohio's working families deserve the peace of mind of knowing that if they experience a major life event or medical emergency in the family, they can take paid time off to appropriately respond to the situation. Currently, in Ohio, this is a luxury that few have access to or the means to rely on. According to a 2018 Labor Department survey, two-thirds of workers who need to take leave are unable to do so because they cannot afford the loss in income. Among workers who do take leave, the same survey found that 3 in 5 low-wage workers go unpaid and 1 in 5 workers either lose their job, lose seniority, or lose the potential for advancement.¹

House Bill 491 seeks to address this problem by creating the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program under the purview of the Department of Job and Family Services. The legislation would allow for an individual to receive family and medical leave insurance benefits to address a serious health condition; care for a new child after birth, adoption, or foster care placement; cope with loss following a stillbirth or third-trimester miscarriage; address issues related to a family member's military deployment; care for a child, parent, or spouse who has a serious health condition; or any other leave as authorized by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act. In order to be eligible for program benefits, an individual must file a claim with ODJFS; must have worked at least 680 hours during the base period; and must demonstrate that they have made contributions to the program for at least one year. The Program is to be funded by assessing premiums, which will be deducted by an employer from an employee's paycheck, or an employer may opt to pay the contributions on behalf of employees. In other states that have already implemented paid leave, workers pay as little as \$1-\$2 per week. Employees may have the option to opt-out of the program if their employers already offers paid family leave greater than the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or if they are independent contractors. An employee who elects to opt out of participating in the Program is not liable for any premium or contribution that would otherwise be due under the Program. For many small businesses and

¹ <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/fmla2018>

employers, a state-run program is more cost effective than individual plans, making it possible for all employers to offer this benefit to all workers.

Working people in Ohio should not have to worry about losing their job or falling behind financially just to take care of a sick child or family member; address their own serious health condition; or care for and bond with their newborn child. By allowing working people to put their family first, we can truly make Ohio a better place to live, work, and raise a family. I would be happy to answer any additional questions that you may have.