FAMILY–FRIENDLY LEAVE POLICIES: IMPROVING HOW WORKERS BALANCE HOME AND FAMILY

FIELD HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE PROTECTIONS

COMMITTEE ON

EDUCATION AND LABOR

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

HEARING HELD IN HAUPPAUGE, NY, JUNE 9, 2008

Serial No. 110–94

Printed for the use of the Committee on Education and Labor

Available on the Internet:
http://www.gpoaccess.gov/congress/house/education/index.html

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

42–727 PDF WASHINGTON : 2008

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
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FAMILY–FRIENDLY LEAVE POLICIES: IMPROVING HOW WORKERS BALANCE HOME AND FAMILY

Monday, June 9, 2008
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Workforce Protections
Committee on Education and Labor
Washington, DC

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:30 a.m., at the William H. Rogers Legislative Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Hauppauge, New York, Hon. Lynn Woolsey [chairwoman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Woolsey and Bishop.

Staff present: Lynn Dondis, Senior Policy Advisor, Subcommittee on Workforce Protections; Sara Lonardo, Junior Legislative Associate for Labor; Rob Gregg, Minority Senior Legislative Assistant.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. I want to thank everyone for coming here to Hauppauge, New York, for the field hearing on balancing work and family.

I especially want to thank Representative Bishop for hosting the Workforce Protections Subcommittee in this wonderful location.

And thanks to his staff and the crew here at the William H. Rogers Legislature Building for all of your work in preparing for the hearing.

In Congress, Mr. Bishop has been working diligently on behalf of working families. Just recently, the House passed his bill, H.R. 2744, which will clarify that airline attendants and pilots are covered by The Family and Medical Leave Act. So you see, FMLA can be improved.

Congressman Bishop will no doubt elaborate on what this legislation does, anyway we hope he does, in his opening statement.

The Subcommittee on Workforce Protections and our members are dedicated to finding solutions so that workers in this country can better balance work and family.

During the Congress, so far, the subcommittee has held three hearings on balancing work and family. Today we will focus on the issue of paid leave.

Balancing work and family is a challenge for most of us, and it is important that we, as a nation, address this issue.

As the cost of living increases and wages remain stagnant, Americans work longer hours and often commute longer distances to be able to pay the bills.

If children have two parents, which is not always the case, both parents are probably in the workforce, so our job is to help those parents bridge both of their jobs: one, their employment, and two, their family.

Americans dream of economic independence, a secure future, and a good life for their children. However, for most Americans, this dream is slipping away. Gasoline costs are sky-high and other household costs are going up rapidly as well.

I was a human resource professional for 20 years, from the 1970s until the 1990s, a working mother as well. And now I watch my children balance work and their families. It is not easy! No worker should be put in a position where choosing between the job and the family is necessary. One policy that helps to relieve such stress is "paid family and medical leave."

Unfortunately, there is no existing Federal policy on paid leave, and only a handful of States, including my home State of California, as well as New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and now Washington State, provide paid leave.

It is true that there are some wonderful companies—such as KPMG, our witness here today—that provide paid leave to its employees.

But despite evidence that such leave actually helps, not hurts, the employers' bottom line, the number of employers providing paid leave—especially maternity leave—is less than it was 10 years ago. Can you believe it? We, the wealthiest nation in the world, are regressing.

Amazingly, even without paid leave, workers manage to get by. But, we can do better for our workers and their families than "getting by." We can bridge work and family.

We will be hearing from Julienne Condos, whose coworkers from St. Charles Hospital have generously contributed their own vacation time to her so she and her husband can get along financially while coping with her diagnosis of acute leukemia.

We will also hear from George Blekas, who has been able to take family and medical leave to care for his wife who has breast cancer.

But leave is unpaid, and while Mr. Blekas has been able to take the leave knowing that his job is secure, his family has gone from a comfortable life to living paycheck to paycheck.

Reports tell us that there are countless others who, while eligible for leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, do not take it because they simply cannot afford time off without pay.

This is not to say that we aren't making any progress in providing family and medical leave to people who need it.

Just this year the President signed into law the first-ever expansion of the Family and Medical Leave Act, my legislation, to provide six months of leave to workers with wounded service members.

The legislation also allows families to take leave from work in the event a family member is deployed overseas.

I am proud to have sponsored the legislation, but we need to go further and make it paid leave.

The U.S. is lagging behind the rest of the world in providing paid leave. A study of workplace policies in over 170 countries found that the U.S. was one of four countries—with Papua New Guinea,

Swaziland and Liberia—that did not have paid sick leave for new mothers. That is unacceptable.

And so this session, I reintroduced the Balancing Act which puts into place a whole host of family-friendly policies, including a provision for paid leave.

And on April 22, I, along with my colleagues Chairman Miller, Representatives Stark and Maloney, introduced H.R. 5873, The Family Leave Insurance Act, which will provide workers with 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave.

We must adopt paid leave policies because workers should not be put in a situation where they are forced to choose between keeping their job and caring for their family.

I am looking forward to hearing everyone's testimony today.

Mr. BISHOP. I want to first thank Chairwoman Woolsey for having this hearing on Long Island. I also want to thank each of our witnesses for coming here today to share their story or expertise.

Chairwoman Woolsey's leadership has been invaluable in making sure important issues are discussed by the Congress. I also would like to thank her staff for putting this hearing together, as well as Lisa Wieber and Charlie Boeckmann in my office here in New York and Joanna Serra in my Washington office for all their hard work.

Balancing work and family is an issue that affects Long Islanders every day. Many of our families juggle caring for children while having two parents that work full-time. When illness occurs, for either a family member or themselves, balancing becomes even more of a challenge.

I believe that Government could and should be doing more to help families balance care for loved ones while still protecting their job and financial security. In fact, when it comes to paid leave, the United States lags seriously behind other industrialized countries. We rank last in the amount of paid leave that is provided to new parents.

Families here on Long Island and around the country have to choose between caring for themselves or a family member and going to work for a much needed paycheck.

The Family Medical Leave Act, FMLA, was passed in 1993. It allows employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for themselves or a loved one.

No one can deny that FMLA has been a great program for working families in this country. No one can question the benefit it has provided for working women and men by being able to take time off from work to care for themselves or family members.

However, today we will hear from two witnesses who will discuss the burden of unpaid leave and the need for paid leave. Many employees report that the main reason they do not take FMLA leave is "lack of money."

We will also hear from Donna Dolan, an expert on both Federal and State policies on family leave.

We will also hear from a company, KPMG, that already provides paid leave. KPMG realizes that providing a benefit like paid leave not only benefits employees, but employers as well. Employees who receive benefits like paid leave are more likely to stay at their jobs, feel more loyalty to their employer, and are happier employees and are more productive.

Since FMLA passed in 1993, there has sadly only been one extension of FMLA—and that was merely months ago when Congress passed a provision in the Defense Authorization bill allowing up to six months of unpaid leave for family members of seriously wounded soldiers or 12 weeks for a qualifying exigency. Ms. Woolsey's leadership was instrumental in making sure this bill passed the Congress and was signed into law.

In addition, last month, a bill that I sponsored, H.R. 2744, the Airline Flight Crew Technical Corrections Act, passed in the House of Representatives with overwhelming support.

The intent of the FMLA was to provide for 12 weeks of unpaid leave if an employee has worked 60 percent of a full-time schedule over the past year.

While 1,250 hours adequately reflects 60 percent of a full-time schedule for the vast majority of employees in this country, that equation does not work for flight attendants and pilots. Flight attendants and pilots work under the Railway Labor Act rather than the Fair Labor Standards Act which covers most 9-5 workers.

Time between flights, whether during the day or on overnights/layovers, is based on company scheduling requirements and needs but does not count towards crew member time at work. Flight attendants and pilots can spend up to four to five days a week away from home and family due to the nature of their job, however all those hours will not count towards qualification.

H.R. 2744 will finally fix this technical problem and flight crew members will be able to receive the benefit that they deserve.

While there is much more to be done on the Federal level for paid leave, several States have begun to enact their own paid leave policies. Most recently, New Jersey became the third State to enact a paid leave policy.

Although New York State does not have a paid leave policy, employees may take temporary disability insurance after the birth of a child. Workers may have receive 50 percent of their wage—with a maximum of $170 per week—hardly enough to care for a family considering today's cost of living. Disability insurance is not available to care for older, disabled or sick family members.

While this is notable, more needs to be done.

I look forward to hearing from all our witnesses today on this important subject affecting Long Islanders, and I hope that we can all come to some conclusion about what should be done.

Without objection, I would like to enter Congressman Bishop's testimony and both of our opening remarks into the record. So moved.

[The statement of Ms. Woolsey follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Lynn C. Woolsey, Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

I want to thank everyone for coming to Hauppauge, New York for this field hearing on balancing work and family.

I especially want to thank Representative Bishop for hosting the Workforce Protections Subcommittee in this wonderful location.

And thanks to his staff and the crew here at the William H. Rogers Legislature Building for all of your work in preparing for the hearing.

In Congress, Mr. Bishop has been working diligently on behalf of working families, and just recently the House passed his bill, H.R. 2744, which will clarify that airline attendants and pilots are covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act.

He will no doubt elaborate on what this legislation does in his opening statement.

But I want all of you to know how much Representative Bishop cares about these issues.

The Subcommittee on Workforce Protections is dedicated to finding solutions so that workers in this country can better balance work and family.

During the 110th Congress, the Subcommittee has held 3 hearings on balancing work and family, and today we will focus on the issue of paid leave.

Balancing work and family is a challenge for most of us, and it is important that we as a country address this issue.

As the cost of living increases and wages remain the stagnant, Americans have to work longer hours to be able to pay the bills.

Most of us work because we have to, despite the fact that we may also have a spouse or partner also works.

It now takes 2 people in a household to pay the mortgage, the rent and to put food on the table.

Americans dream of economic independence, a secure future, and a good life for their children.

However, for most Americans this dream is slipping away.

Gasoline costs are sky-high and other household costs are going up rapidly as well.

I was a human resource manager for 20 years and, for many years, a single mother supporting 3 children on my own.

So I know what it is like for workers to try to balance work and home life, at the same time they are worrying about their family's economic security.

All families, including those struggling to stay in the middle class, need Government to develop policies that will help ease their burden.

One of these policies is the establishment of paid family and medical leave.

Unfortunately, there is no existing federal policy on paid leave, and only a handful of states, including my home state of California, as well as New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and now Washington State provide any kind of paid leave.

It is true that there are some wonderful companies—such as KPMG, our witness here today—that provide paid leave to its employees.

But despite evidence that such leave actually helps not hurts employers' bottom line, the number of employers providing paid leave—especially maternity leave—is shrinking and is less than it was 10 years ago.

Amazingly, even without paid leave, workers have managed to get by.

We will be hearing from Julienne Condos, whose coworkers from St. Charles Hospital have generously contributed their own vacation time to her and her husband so they can get along financially while coping with her diagnosis of acute leukemia.

We will also hear from George Blekas, who has been able to take family and medical leave to care for his wife who has breast cancer.

But that leave is unpaid, and while Mr. Blekas has been able to take the leave knowing that his job is secure, his family has gone from a comfortable life to living paycheck to paycheck.

But there are countless others who, while eligible for leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act, do not take it.

And the most frequent reason they cite for not taking the leave is that they cannot afford it.

This is not to say that we aren't making any progress in providing family and medical leave to people who need it.

Just this year the President signed in law the first-ever expansion of the Family and Medical Leave Act to provide 6 months of leave to workers with wounded servicemembers.

The legislation also allows families to take leave from work in the event a family member is deployed overseas.

I am proud to have been a sponsor of that legislation, but that leave is still unpaid and we need to go further.

After all, the U.S. is lagging behind the rest of the world in providing paid leave.

A study of workplace policies in over 170 countries found that the U.S. was one of 4 countries—with Papua New Guinea, Swaziland and Liberia—that did not have paid sick leave for new mothers.

That is unacceptable.

And so this session, I reintroduced the Balancing Act which puts into a place a whole host of family-friendly policies, including a provision for paid leave.

And on April 22, I, along with my colleagues Chairman Miller, Representatives Stark and Maloney introduced H.R. 5873, the Family Leave Insurance Act, which will provide workers with 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave.

We must adopt paid leave policies because workers should not be put in a situation where they are forced to choose between keeping their job and caring for there family.

I am looking forward to hearing everyone's testimony today.

[The statement of Mr. Bishop follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Timothy H. Bishop, a Representative in Congress From the State of New York

I want to first thank Chairwoman Woolsey for having this hearing on Long Island. I also want to thank each of our witnesses for coming here today to share their story or expertise.

Balancing work and family is an issue that affects Long Islanders everyday. Many of our families juggle caring for children while having two parents that work full time. When illness occurs, for either a family member or themselves, balancing becomes even more of a challenge

I believe that government could and should be doing more to help families balance care for loved ones while still protecting job and financial security. In fact, when it comes to paid leave, the United States lags seriously behind other industrialized countries.

They like many others here on Long Island and around the country have to choose between caring for themselves or a family members or going to work for a much needed paycheck.

The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was passed in 1993 it allows employees to take for 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for themselves or a loved ones.

No one can deny that FMLA has been a great program for working families in this country. No one can question the benefit it has provided for working women and men by being able to take time off from work to care for themselves or family members.

However, today we will hear from two witnesses who will discuss the burden of unpaid leave and the need for paid leave. Many employees report that the main reason they do not take FMLA leave is "lack of money."

We will also hear from Donna Dolan, an expert on both Federal and state policies on family leave.

We will also here from a company, KPMG, that already provides paid leave.

KPMG realizes that providing a benefit like paid leave, not only benefits employees but employers as well.

Employees who receive benefits like paid leave are more likely to stay at their jobs, feel more loyalty to their employer and are overall happier employees and more productive.

Since FMLA passed in1993, there has sadly only been one extension of FMLA—and that was merely months ago when Congress passed a provision in the Defense Authorization bill allowing up to 6 months of unpaid leave for family members of seriously wounded soldiers or 12 weeks.

In addition, last month, a bill that I sponsored, HR2744, the Airline Flight Crew Technical Corrections Act, and every member of this Subcommittee sponsored passed in the House of Representatives with overwhelming support.

The intent of the FMLA was to provide for 12 weeks of unpaid leave if an employee has worked 60% of a full time schedule over the past year.

While 1,250 hours adequately reflects 60% of a full time schedule for the vast majority of employees in this country, that equation does not work for flight attendants and pilots. Flight attendants and pilots work under the Railway Labor Act rather than the Fair Labor Standards Act which covers most 9-5 workers.

Time between flights, whether during the day or on overnights/layovers, is based on company scheduling requirements and needs but does not count towards crewmember time at work. Flight attendants and pilots can spend up to 4—5 days a week away from home and family due to the nature of their job, however all those hours will not count towards qualification.

HR2744, will finally fix this technical problems and Flight Crew members will be able to receive the benefit that they deserve.

While there is much more to be done on the federal level for paid leave, several states have begun to enact their own paid leave policies. Most recently, New Jersey became the third state to enact a paid leave policy.

Although NY State does not have a paid lave policy, employees may take temporary disability insurance after the birth of a child. Workers may receive 50% of their wage—with a maximum of $170 per week—hardly enough to care for a family

considering today's cost of living. Disability insurance is NOT available to care for older, disabled or sick family members.

While this is notable, more need to be done.

I look forward to hearing for all our witnesses today on this important subject affecting Long Islanders and I hope that we can all come to some conclusion about what should be done.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. Now I would like to introduce our very distinguished panel of witnesses who came here this afternoon and have been very patient with us. Thank you.

I am going to introduce them in the order they are going to speak, introduce them all at once.

Donna Dolan is employed by the Communication Workers of America and has been the CWA District 1 Director of Work-Family Issues for the past 16 years. Ms. Dolan chairs the New York State Paid Family Leave Coalition, and is a steering committee member of the multi-State consortium on paid leave. She is a graduate of Boston College and holds a master's degree from Bowling Green State University.

Julienne Condos has been employed by St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson, New York, since 1998, most recently as the Director of Program Development on Rehabilitation. Last year, Ms. Condos was diagnosed with acute leukemia and has been unable to return to work. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Ithaca College and has been pursuing her Masters in health care administration at Stony Brook University. Ms. Condos lives with her husband and two young children in Rocky Point, New York.

George Blekas has been employed as an outside field technician at Verizon in Riverhead, New York, for 20 years. Last year, his wife, Maria, was diagnosed with breast cancer and he has had to take unpaid family and medical leave to care for her. Mr. Blekas has attended college at the University of Texas and State University of New York in Selden as part of Verizon's Next Step Program. He lives in Manorville with his wife and two sons.

Barbara Wankoff is the director of workplace solutions at KPMG. She has 25 years of professional experience in human resources and joined KPMG in the year 2000. She has been in her current position since 2003. Ms. Wankoff received her BA from Brandeis University. This will be the second time she has testified before the subcommittee, and we welcome her back. Thank you very much.

Now, for those of you who have not testified before this subcommittee, let me explain our lighting system and the 5-minute rule. Everyone, including Members, is limited to five minutes of presentation or questioning. The green light is illuminated when you begin to speak. When you see the yellow light, it means you have one minute remaining. When you see the red light, it means your time has expired and you need to conclude your testimony. We don't cut you off in mid-sentence, in mid-thought or in mid-idea, so don't worry about that. And know that if you had a lot more you wanted to say, during the question and answering, we will make that possible.

So we will now hear from our first witness, Ms. Dolan.

STATEMENT OF DONNA DOLAN, CHAIR, NEW YORK STATE PAID FAMILY LEAVE COALITION

Ms. DOLAN. Good morning, Honorable Members of Congress, staff, fellow witnesses and guests. My name is Donna Dolan. Thank you for inviting me here to testify today on behalf of the New York State Paid Family Leave Coalition.

The Coalition, which has been working to advance paid family leave and paid sick days here in New York State, is comprised of over 100 organizations representing labor and advocates for low-income working families, women, children, seniors, the disabled and the chronically ill. The Coalition also has a small business advocacy component. I am here today to urge Congress to pass a comprehensive paid family leave insurance program.

Momentum is growing around the country to provide universal paid family leave through social insurance. Why? Because we know it is well past the time that the workplace practices catch up with the realty of today's workforce where the vast majority of women are working. We know it takes two earners to earn a decent standard of living. And this is all about, ladies and gentlemen, ending the war, the tug of war that workers feel when they are pulled between their work and family responsibilities. And it is also about the health of our nation.

We know that early childhood development is absolutely critical, and we know that infants do better when they have parental time. As just one example, in a large randomized trial, researchers found that breast feeding is associated with improved scores on intelligence tests in childhood. Studies have shown that a longer maternal leave significantly improves the health outcomes for the mother. We know that seriously ill children recover more quickly when a parent can take care of them. We know that we will save money on Medicare and Medicaid when a family member can be there when an aging parent is discharged from the hospital.

Our neighbor, New Jersey, has become the third State to enact paid family leave, after California and Washington State. Five other States—Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and those of us here in New York—have bills in progress.

Last year here in New York, we came very, very close. The Assembly passed a bill and Governor Spitzer had his pen ready to sign it. But the Senate instead decided to hold hearings around the State rather than bring the paid family leave bill to the floor for a vote.

So this year, we are working on a new bill that was just introduced by the Senate last Friday the end of the day, and that would fix the problem that we have had which is a low benefit level.

Currently, TDI, temporary disability insurance, in New York State is capped at $170 a week. We are looking to raise the temporary, the entire temporary disability insurance benefit rate, and paid family leave of course would be a part of this higher benefit rate and it would be phased in over two years and it would be capped at 50 percent of the State-wide average weekly wage. And by the year 2010, this would be $550 a week. And then from then on, it would keep pace with inflation.

And New York has an advantage because we are one of only five States that already have a State-wide temporary disability insurance.

But universal family leave insurance cannot happen without Federal action. The 2008 National Study of Employers that Congresswoman Woolsey made reference to, just released by the Families and Work Institute, found that there has been no progress on most measures of family-friendly workplace practices over the past decade, and that, as she stated, we are moving backwards when it comes to maternity leave.

The percent of employers that have more than 100 employees providing full pay during the period of maternity-related disability has dropped down to 16 percent. That is down from 27 percent 10 years ago.

We can afford to do paid family leave here in New York State; and of course, we can afford to do it, we believe, nationally. But in terms of the States, the actual cost in California is just 58 cents a week deducted from the employees' paychecks. And in New Jersey, the projected cost is similar, 63 cents a week, or a maximum of $33 a year.

Voters overwhelmingly support paid family leave. We need to do it on the Federal level.

I see my red light.

And until that happens on the Federal level, we need to do it at the State level.

Thank you very much.

[The statement of Ms. Dolan follows:]

Prepared Statement of Donna Dolan, Chair, New York State Paid Family Leave Coalition

My name is Donna Dolan. Thank you for inviting me here to testify today on behalf of the New York State Paid Family Leave Coalition. The Coalition, which has been working to advance paid family leave and paid sick days, is comprised of over 100 organizations representing labor and advocates for low-income working families, women, children, seniors, the disabled and chronically ill. I am here to urge the Congress to pass a comprehensive paid family leave insurance program.

Every American at some point in her or his life will need time to care for a newborn or newly adopted child, for an aging parent, or for a seriously ill family member, or will be that baby, aging parent, or ill spouse. The workers who need to take time off to provide that care should not have to choose between their loved ones and their livelihoods.

Momentum is growing around the country to provide universal paid family leave through social insurance. Why? Because it is well past time for workplace practices to catch up to the reality of today's labor force where the vast majority of women are working and it takes two earners to provide a decent standard of living. It is about ending the war, the tug of war workers feel when they are pulled between work and family responsibilities. And it is also about the health of our nation.

We know that early child development is absolutely critical. And we know that infants do better when they have parental time. As just one example, in a recent large randomized trial, researchers found that breast-feeding is associated with improved scores on intelligence tests in childhood. Studies by Chatterji, et. al., Fein and Roe, Visness and Kennedy and others have found that returning to work sooner significantly decreases the likelihood and duration of breast-feeding. In particular, women returning to work full-time and low-income women have difficulty continuing breast-feeding. In addition to benefiting the child, many studies have shown that a longer maternal leave also significantly improves health outcomes for the mother. We know that seriously ill children recover more quickly when a parent can take care of them. We know that we will save money on Medicare and Medicaid when a family member can be there when an aging parent is discharged from the hospital.

Our neighbor, New Jersey has just become the third state to enact paid family leave, after California and Washington. Five other states, Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and New York have bills in progress.

Last year New York came very, very close. The Assembly passed a bill and Governor Spitzer had his pen ready to sign it. But the Senate decided to hold hearings rather than bring the bill to the floor. Last year's bill would have provided up to 12 weeks of paid leave to care for a new child during the first year or a seriously ill family member. All private workers, including part-time employees, were covered and local and state government workers could decide whether or not to opt in. The benefit would have been the same as for Temporary Disability Insurance, which is capped at $170 a week and hasn't been raised since 1989. We all know that this is laughably low and needs to be increased.

So this year we are working on a new bill that would fix that problem and phase in a higher benefit level, increasing to half a worker's average weekly wage, capped at 50% of the statewide average weekly wage. That would place the cap at over $500 a week and would automatically keep pace with changing wage levels over time.

The states are now at the forefront of change as has been the case for other sensible policy ideas that provide a basic floor of support for working families: raising the minimum wage, expanding health insurance coverage, work supports for mothers who have moved from welfare to jobs but not out of poverty, and ensuring that all workers can occasionally call in sick without fear of being fired. States provide useful laboratories, demonstrating that these policies work, testing variations, and ultimately putting to rest predictions that policies that are good for hard-working American consumers and tax-payers are somehow bad for business.

New York has an advantage because we are one of the five states that already have a statewide temporary disability insurance system. In effect, we already have the "M" in FMLA, partial wage replacement for your own serious illness, so now we need to expand it to provide the "F". But 45 other states do not have a ready-made model to build on.

Universal family leave insurance will not happen by itself without federal action. The 2008 National Study of Employers just released a few weeks ago by the Families and Work Institute found that there has been no progress on most measures of family-friendly workplace practices over the past decade, and that we are moving backwards when it comes to maternity leave. The percent of employers (with more than 100 employees) providing full pay during the period of maternity-related disability has dropped to 16 percent, down from 27 percent in 1998.

State initiatives and legislation at the national level to provide paid family leave for federal workers are important because they pave the way for passage of comprehensive, national paid family leave insurance. But the ultimate goal must be adoption of paid family leave at the federal level. We are one nation. It is good for our economy when workers can move to seek better opportunities for themselves and their families. Why should children be assured a healthy start in Hoboken but be deprived of the best shot at early childhood development across the river in Harlem? Why should a worker be able to afford to take time off to provide temporary care for a seriously ill aging mom or dad in Jersey City but not in Kansas City or Oklahoma City or New York City? The most successful social policies in America have been universal. Think Social Security and Medicare.

We can afford to do this. The actual cost in California is just 58 cents a week, deducted from employees' paychecks. In New Jersey the projected cost is similar, 63 cents a week or a maximum of $33 a year.

The voters overwhelmingly support paid family leave. A recent national survey by the polling firm Lake Research found 76% in favor of paid family leave. Support is even higher in New York. A survey in New York City by Lake Research for Community Service Society found that 86% supported paid family leave—with three out of four of those surveyed saying that they strongly favored it. That is stunningly high support.

H.R. 5873, the Family Leave Insurance Act of 2008, would fulfill the unfinished promise of the Family and Medical Leave Act, by ensuring that workers could actually afford to take family leave. The bill contains excellent provisions that we support including up to 12 weeks of leave, expanding the definition of family, job protection and structuring benefits progressively so that lower-wage workers get a higher percentage of their weekly earnings. It would cover some part-time workers. We would suggest that this provision be broadened since many working women with young children, employees who most need this benefit, are employed part-time.

I would also urge you to consider a proposal suggested by my colleague Nancy Rankin, for "Fixing Social Insecurity." In her 2002 book Taking Parenting Public, she suggests modernizing Social Security to allow workers to draw social security benefits for up to three years during their prime caregiving years. Social Security

has helped diminish the poverty once faced by the aging after retirement. But Americans now face a new period of financial insecurity earlier in their lifetimes, when they need to take time off during their working years to raise the next generation or care for the previous one. This could be accomplished by raising the taxable earnings base for Social Security, a very small add-on to the payroll tax, or possibly some offsetting adjustment to retirement benefits for beneficiaries who have opted for caregiving benefits as is done now for those choosing early retirement.

Many of you have heard the statistics that in international comparisons, the United States comes in dead last among 168 countries, tied with Liberia, Swaziland and Papua New Guinea in providing zero paid maternity leave. Providing paid family leave will not keep our country from being competitive in the global economy. But failing to promote healthy early child development most certainly will.

Allow me to close with a personal story. As we campaign around the state for paid family leave, one of us dresses up as a giant stork who personally delivers thousands of constituent postcards to our elected officials urging the passage of paid leave. It gets attention. When we asked our tall, hefty colleague who played our stork on a recent Albany visit if he felt silly wearing this costume, he took off his stork head and told us his story. "I'm glad to be the stork because I know how important this issue is. A few weeks ago, in April, my wife and I had a baby. My wife had to spend the last three weeks on complete bed rest and the final week in the hospital. So I had to take off from work to take care of our three year-old son who is autistic. When I went back to work, they told me I would not get paid. I couldn't pay our bills."

Thank you.

STATEMENT OF JULIENNE CONDOS, DIRECTOR OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FOR REHABILITATION, ST. CHARLES HOSPITAL

Ms. CONDOS. Thank you for inviting me to testify at this hearing today. Family-friendly leave policies including paid leave are issues that are very dear to my heart. And I hope that my story will assist Congress as it looks to developing a national policy for paid leave.

My family and I live in Rocky Point, New York, and my husband Steve and I are employed by St. Charles Hospital which is located in Port Jefferson.

In June 2007, I had my second child and I took 11 weeks of family and medical leave from my job as the Chief Therapist to care for and bond with my baby.

My employer does not provide paid parental leave, but most of my time was paid because my employer does allow its workers to use their sick and vacation time. A few weeks of my leave were unpaid, but I was grateful to be home with my son even though it was difficult not receiving a paycheck during this time.

My husband took time off for the birth of our son. He didn't take family and medical leave, but used his vacation time instead.

I went back to work in September, but unfortunately in January of this year I was diagnosed with acute leukemia. Since then, I have not been able to work. I did try to resume my job in mid April, but after four days, I was completely exhausted. And the side effects of some of my medications made it very difficult for me to concentrate and focus on my work. At that time, I was receiving weekly outpatient chemotherapy, and since then I was rehospitalized for additional chemotherapy. I continue to travel to Manhattan at least once a week to see my doctor to have blood work done, get IV fluids and blood or platelet transfusions whenever I need them. Due to the nature of my type of cancer, I will need to continue chemotherapy for the next two years. My doctors said there is a 50

percent chance of the leukemia coming back, and if it does, then I will need to have a bone marrow transplant. Right now, whatever energy I have goes to caring for my two young children and my husband.

All my vacation time and sick time was used up during my maternity leave, and I was very worried about being able to help support my family during my illness. In addition, I knew that my husband would need to take time off to help take me to appointments and to help care for me and the children. So I was very worried about how we would get by and if I would lose my job for being out of work for such a long period of time.

My father was in a similar situation after he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. He needed a stem cell transplant and was out of work for an extended period of time. His employer let him go, and he needed to use his retirement savings to make ends meet. After his treatment was over, he relocated to South Carolina because he could no longer afford to live in New York.

A friend a fellow therapist also has a tragic circumstance. She is the mother of three boys and pregnant with twins. Early in her pregnancy, she learned there was a complication. The babies have twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome. She underwent intra-uterine surgery, and has been on bed rest since March. The babies are due on August 19. She will be out of work for quite sometime, and this has been very difficult financially for her and her family.

However, I have been very fortunate. I am on short term disability through August, and my employer has allowed my coworkers to donate vacation time for both my husband and I to use. I am very grateful to my employer St. Charles Hospital and my wonderful coworkers. They have lightened our load considerably.

So today I am speaking up for the countless others who are not so lucky and who become pregnant, or sick, or have a family member who are sick and can only take leave on an unpaid basis, which for many means they can't take leave at all.

We need a national policy which guarantees workers with paid family and medical leave. I understand that we are behind most of the world because we don't offer this benefit, and I commend the subcommittee for looking into this important issue.

Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Condos follows:]

Prepared Statement of Julienne Condos, Director of Program Development for Rehabilitation, St. Charles Hospital

Thank you for inviting me to testify at this hearing today. Family-friendly leave policies, including paid leave, are issues that are very dear to my heart. I hope that my story will assist Congress as it looks at developing a national policy for paid leave.

My family and I live in Rocky Point, New York and my husband, Steve and I are employed by St. Charles Hospital, which is located in Port Jefferson. In June, 2007, I had my second child and took 11 weeks of family and medical leave from my job as the Chief Therapist for Inpatient Rehabilitation to care for and bond with my baby. My employer does not provide paid parental leave, but most of my leave time was paid because my employer does allow its workers to utilize their sick and vacation time for this purpose. A few weeks of my leave were unpaid, but I was grateful for the time even though it was difficult not receiving a paycheck during that time.

My husband took time off for the birth of our son. He did not take family and medical leave as such but utilized his vacation time for this purpose.

I went back to work in September, but unfortunately in January of this year, I was diagnosed with acute leukemia. Since then, I have not been able to work. I did try to resume my job in mid-April but after 4 days, I was completely exhausted. And the side effects of some of my medications made it very difficult for me to concentrate and focus on my work. At that time I was receiving weekly outpatient chemotherapy and since then I was re-hospitalized for additional chemotherapy. I travel into Manhattan at least once a week to see my doctor, have blood work done and get IV fluids and blood or platelet transfusions when needed. Due to the nature of my type of cancer I will need to continue chemo therapy for the next 2 years. There is a 50% chance of the leukemia coming back. If it does return I will need to have a bone marrow transplant. Whatever energy I have goes to caring for my two young children and my husband.

All my vacation and sick time was used up on my maternity leave, and I was very worried about being able to help support my family during my illness. In addition, I knew that my husband would need time off to take me to appointments and to help care for me and the children. How would we get by? And would I lose my job if I had to be out of work for a long period of time? My father was in a similar situation after he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma. He needed a stem cell transplant and was out of work for several months. His employer let him go and he had to use his retirement savings to make ends meet. After his treatment was over he relocated to South Carolina because he could no longer afford to live in New York.

A friend and fellow therapist also has a tragic circumstance. She is a mother of three boys and pregnant with twins. Early in the pregnancy she learned that there was a complication; the babies have twin to twin transfusion syndrome. She underwent intrauterine surgery and has been on bed rest since March. The babies are due on August 19th. She will be out of work for quite some time. This has been very difficult financially for her and her family.

However, I have been very fortunate. I am on short-term disability through August, and my employer has allowed my co-workers to donate up to 450 hours of vacation time for both my husband and I to use. I am very grateful to my employer, St. Charles Hospital and my wonderful co-workers. They have lightened our load considerably.

So today, I am speaking up for the countless others who are not so lucky and who become pregnant or are sick or have family members who are sick and can only take leave on an unpaid basis—which for many means they can't take leave at all.

We need a national policy which guarantees workers with paid family and medical leave.

I understand that we trail most of the world because we don't offer this benefit, and I commend the Subcommittee for looking into this important issue.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF GEORGE BLEKAS, OUTSIDE FIELD TECHNICIAN, VERIZON

Mr. BLEKAS. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests. My name is George Blekas. My purpose for being here today is to tell you about my experience with FMLA and the financial impact it has had upon my family while dealing with a catastrophic illness.

I would like to give you a little of my background first. I graduated Plainview-Old Bethpage High School in 1979. I went to college at the State University of New York at Fredonia. I transferred to the University of Texas in Austin, Texas to study government and history. After Texas, I moved back to New York in 1989 and landed a job with New York Telephone.

Ironically, one month later I found myself on the picket line in order to keep our medical coverage. CWA called for a strike. At the time, I must admit, it wasn't as obvious to me as it is today how important this fight really was.

By 2000, New York Telephone had undergone a number of name changes, and one of the big changes brought about was a cut to the customary overtime that we have grown accustomed to having. Liv-

ing on Long Island is an expensive proposition and, you know, it is not really an option to live here on less.

So not being lazy, I had started my own boutique guitar electronics on the World Wide Web. This was a perfect second income for me because it didn't interfere with my family, my job, baseball.

My story really revolves around my wife and children, so I would like to touch on them for a moment.

I have known my wife, Maria, since we were 4. We went to school all the way from kindergarten through graduating. After high school, we went our separate ways and didn't get back together until 1989 when I got back to New York.

We started dating on the 4th of July, we got engaged on the 4th of July, and we got married on the 4th of July, which is kind of ironic when you think about tying the knot on Independence Day, but it kind of made it impossible for me to get in trouble by forgetting my anniversary.

Today we have two boys—Nicholas, who is 14, and Brian, who is 11 years old—both very active in baseball. Once Brian was old enough to go to school, Maria got a job as a teacher's aide in Eastport South Manor School District. This was our third income. And the job was perfect because Maria's schedule mirrors the boys' schedule.

One day while at one of the boys' baseball games, Maria jumps up and cheers and feels something. Ironically, this was September 11, 2007, that we felt this lump that appeared to engulf her entire breast. By September 21, we had the news that it was an 8-centimeter Stage 3 breast cancer. Needless to say, everything changed for us that day.

I took vacation time to cover the many doctor visits and tests that Maria had to go through. Quickly that ran out and I was informed by my boss, Tom Schultz and Rick Nemcheck of CWA 1108, of something called FMLA. FMLA would allow me to keep my job while give me 12 weeks off without pay to tend to the medical needs of my wife.

With my job secure, I was able to concentrate on cancer and its various treatments and the many side effects. I was reading everything I could find on the subject.

Maria had to leave work, as she had 10 weeks of chemotherapy, a mastectomy, and 30 doses of radiation she had to deal with, so work for her was not an option.

At this point, I am mom, dad, nurse, part-time Verizon employee. I no longer had time nor the energy to work my electronics business. In effect, I lost my second income, my wife's income, and Verizon's income because FMLA does not pay for those missed days.

With bills coming in, you resort to savings which is quickly depleted, and income down to a trickle. You are scrambling to keep from losing your house and keep a roof over your wife and children's heads. I sold a car, I had to cash in a 401(k) that my wife had prior to getting married, and I wondered what I would do next. Do I get another mortgage? Do I take from my 401(k)? Do I sell a kidney? What do I do?

I think we live in the greatest country in the world, and I think we can do better. We talk about family values. Paid Family Med-

ical Leave Act would be not just talking to talk, but walking the walk where family values are concerned.

So I suggest, I urge Congress to pass this Paid Family Leave Legislation and New York State to pass the same by the end of the month session, June 23, in order to alleviate the grim realty of living paycheck to paycheck.

I thank you for your time.

[The statement of Mr. Blekas follows:]

Prepared Statement of George Blekas, Resident of Manorville, NY

Good morning ladies, gentlemen and distinguished guests. My name is George Blekas and my purpose for being here today is to tell my experience with FMLA and the financial impact of dealing with a catastrophic illness.

I would like to give you a little of my background. I graduated Plainview-Old Bethpage high school in 1979, went to college at SUNY, Fredonia and the University of Texas in Austin, Texas. After moving back to New York in 1989 I landed a job with New York Telephone.

Ironically one month after being hired by New York Telephone I wound up walking the picket line to keep my medical coverage. I must admit at the time it was not as obvious to me, as it is today, how important that fight was.

By 2000 New York Telephone had undergone a bunch of name changes and one big change this brought was a cut to the customary over time that I had gotten to used to having. Living on Long Island is an expensive proposition so not being lazy, and being good with electronics, I started up a boutique guitar electronics company on World Wide Web. This was the perfect second income for me as I could do this when ever I had the time and it did not interfere with the family, work or baseball.

My story revolves around my wife and children so I would like to touch on them for a moment. I have known my wife, Maria since we were 4 years old. We went all the way through school and graduated High School together. We went our separate ways during the college years but got together after I got back from Texas in 1989. We started dating on the 4th of July, we got engaged on the 4th of July and we got married on the 4th of July, which is kind of ironic when you think about tying the knot on Independence Day. It does make it impossible to forget your wedding anniversary which tends to keep me out of the dog house. Today we have two boys. Nicholas who is 14 years old and Brian who is 11 years old. Both are very active in travel baseball. Once Brian was old enough to go to school Maria got a job as a teacher's aide in the Eastport South Manor School district. This was our third income and the job was perfect because Maria's schedule was identical to the boy's schedule.

One day while at a baseball game Maria jumped up to cheer and felt something in her left breast. Ironically this was September 11th, 2007 that we felt a lump that appeared to engulf her entire breast. By September 21st we had the news that this was an 8cm stage 3 Breast Cancer. Needless to say everything changed for us that day. We had to spend many days visiting various doctors for all sorts of tests. Initially, I took vacation time to cover the many doctor visits but soon ran out of time. I was informed by my boss, Tom Schultz, and Rick Nemcheck, of CWA Local 1108, of something called FMLA. FMLA would allow me to keep my job while allowing me up to 12 weeks off, without pay, to tend to the medical needs of a family member.

With my job secure I was able to concentrate on cancer and its various treatments and side effects. I was reading everything I could find on the subject. Maria had to leave work as she now had 10 weeks of Chemotherapy, a mastectomy and radiation to deal with so working was not an option for her.

At this point I was a dad, mom, nurse and part time Verizon employee. I no longer had the time, nor energy to do my electronics business. In effect I lost my second income, my wife's income and Verizon income because FMLA does not pay for the time missed tending to a sick family member.

With the bills coming in, savings depleted and income down to a trickle one has to scramble to keep from losing the farm. I sold off a car and cashed in a 401k, that Maria had prior to getting married, in order to keep up and was wondering what I will do next. Another mortgage perhaps? Take from my 401k? Sell a kidney?

Today we are literally living from pay check to pay check so I urge Congress to pass the Paid Family Leave Legislation. I also want to ask the New York State Legislature to pass Paid Family Leave at the state level this month by the end of the

session on June 23rd, in order to alleviate the grim reality of living pay check to pay check.

I thank you for your time. Have a nice day.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. Thank you.

Ms. Wankoff?

STATEMENT OF BARBARA WANKOFF, DIRECTOR OF WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS, KPMG

Ms. WANKOFF. Good morning. My name is Barbara Wankoff and I am KPMG's national director of workplace solutions. I am responsible for the firm's work life benefits and programs supporting our goal to be an employer of choice. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before you today.

KPMG is a tax, audit and advisory firms with more than 21,000 employees and 1,800 partners in the United States, and we believe that helping employees manage their responsibilities both inside and outside of work is beneficial to everyone and to our bottom line.

At KPMG, we are promoting a culture of flexibility. Retaining our employees is very important to the success of our firm. Keeping our best people helps us to maintain client continuity and allow for knowledge sharing. So we have added some very innovative programs to improve our retention rates.

We know there are times in employees' lives when it becomes necessary to take time off to tend to personal concerns and major life events, and we have programs to address these times.

For example, we recognize the critical need for new mothers to bond with their children, so we allow them to take up to 26 weeks of leave, going beyond FMLA, while guaranteeing that their job will be waiting for them when they return. And this applies to births, adoptions or foster care placement. And by paying women 100 percent of their regular salary for up to eight weeks, as well as additional weeks at two-thirds pay, we are making easier for women to take the time off that they want.

We also believe that fathers should have time to bond with their newborns and be there to support their spouses and partners. New fathers receive two weeks of paid parental leave any time within the first year after the birth, adoption or placement of a child in the home. This program has been in place since 2002, and an astounding 82 percent of our fathers have taken advantage of it.

We are proud of the fact that we created an environment at KPMG that encourages people to use these benefits when they need them.

For those employees who are adopting a child, in addition to the two weeks paid leave, an additional six weeks of paid leave is available if your spouse or partner is not staying at home with the child on a temporary or long-term basis. This assures that at least one parent will be home with the newly adopted child for the first six weeks after placement.

We pay attention to not only the time off, but also to our new moms' return to work. To ease the transition for new mothers, we provide privacy rooms for breast feeding and allow them to phase in their return from leave. For example, some new parents return

to work three days per week initially and gradually ramp back up to full-time responsibilities and hours.

Another program we are particularly proud of is called shared leave. This allows an employee caring for a seriously ill relative, and who has exhausted their personal time, to request an additional 12 weeks paid time off that is donated by fellow employees. We developed shared leave after listening to our people tell us that what they wanted most when faced with a serious illness in their family was to spend time with their loved one.

It is amazing how willing coworkers are to donate some of their time to a colleague. Fully 100 percent of shared leave requests are met by the generosity of their fellow employees. This program is a Godsend for those facing difficult times. In 2007, 80 people used 13,957 donated hours.

KPMG also provides unpaid leave for 24 months to pursue various personal interests including additional education or civic duties. These programs enable employees to stay more closely connected to the firm and to return more easily than if they terminated their employment.

KPMG supports our military personnel and provides paid time off for one week of annual reserve training and grants additional time as necessary. In an effort to support our full-time employees who are called to active duty, the firm provides differential pay for the length of the service activation up to six months.

Our generous paid time off policy allows employees to supplement leaves with paid personal time, extending their paid time away from the job, and yet still having time to enjoy vacations throughout the year.

Our commitment to helping working families has not gone unnoticed. KPMG has earned a spot on Working Mother Media's List of 100 Best Companies for Working Mothers 11 times, and we were in the top 10 last year. We have made the Companies That Care Honor Roll five times, and for the past two years Fortune Magazine named KPMG one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For.

These programs help us attract and retain key talent which is critical to meeting clients' needs and to the overall success of the firm. At KPMG, retention rates and morale are up.

Thank you for this opportunity to share KPMG's views with you today.

[The statement of Ms. Wankoff follows:]

Prepared Statement of Barbara Wankoff,
Director of Workplace Solutions, KPMG

Good Afternoon. My name is Barbara Wankoff and I am KPMG's National Director of Workplace Solutions. I am responsible for the firm's work life benefits and programs supporting our goal to be an employer of choice.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify before you today.

KPMG is a tax, audit and advisory firm with more than 21,000 employees and 1800 partners in the United States and we believe that helping employees manage their responsibilities both inside and outside of work is beneficial to everyone, and to our bottom line. Our policies and programs support this belief.

Our employees tend to be ambitious and career oriented. They want to develop professionally and build a career, but they also have lives as parents, sons or daughters, and spouses -- so at KPMG we are promoting a culture of flexibility.

Let me explain what that means.

First, retaining our employees is very important to the success of our firm. Keeping our best people helps us to maintain client continuity and allow for knowledge sharing. So we've added some very innovative programs to improve our retention rates.

We know there are times in employees' lives when it becomes necessary to take time off to tend to personal concerns and major life events and we've got programs to address these times.

For example, we recognize the critical need for new mothers to bond with their children, so we allow them to take up to 26 weeks of leave, going beyond FMLA, while guaranteeing that their job will be waiting for them when they return. And this applies to births, adoptions or foster care placement. And by paying women 100% of their regular salary for up to eight weeks, as well as additional weeks at two-thirds pay, we are making it easier for women to take the time off that they want.

We also believe that fathers should have time to bond with their newborns and be there to support their spouses and partners. New fathers receive 2 weeks of paid parental leave anytime within the first year after the birth, adoption or placement of a child in the home. This program has been in place since 2002 and an astounding 82% of fathers have taken advantage of it.

We like to cite that statistic because we're proud of the fact that we've created an environment at KPMG that encourages people to use these benefits when they need them.

For those employees who are adopting a child, in addition to the two weeks paid leave, an additional six weeks of paid leave is available if your spouse or partner is not staying home with the child on a temporary or long-term basis. This assures that at least one parent will be home with the newly adopted child for the first six weeks after placement.

We pay attention to not only the time off but also to our new moms' return to work. To ease the transition for new mothers we provide privacy rooms for breastfeeding and allow them to phase in their return from leave. For example, some new parents return to work 3 days per week initially and gradually ramp back up to full-time responsibilities and hours.

Another program we're particularly proud of is called shared leave.

This allows an employee caring for a seriously ill relative, and who has exhausted their personal time, to request an additional 12 weeks paid time off that is donated by fellow employees. We developed shared leave after listening to our people tell us that what they wanted most when faced with a serious illness in their family was to spend time with their loved one.

So while we can't provide a miracle cure, we can provide them with additional time-off. And it's amazing how willing co-workers are to donate some of their time to a colleague – fully 100% of these shared leave requests are met by the generosity of their fellow employees. This program is a Godsend for those facing difficult times. In 2007 80 people used 13,957 donated hours.

KPMG also provides unpaid leaves for up to 24 months to pursue various personal interests including additional education or civic duties. These programs enable employees to stay more closely connected to the firm and to return more easily than if they terminated their employment.

KPMG supports our military personnel and provides paid time off for one week of annual reserve training and grants additional time as necessary. In an effort to support our full-time employees who are called to active duty, the firm provides differential pay for the length of the service activation up to six months.

Our generous paid time off policy allows employees to supplement leaves with paid personal time extending their paid time away from the job and yet still having time to enjoy vacations throughout the year.

Our culture of flexibility also allows our people to participate in their family activities while staying fully employed. We do this by offering flextime, compressed work week, telecommuting, job sharing, reduced workloads, and part time work.

When parents or elderly relatives get sick, especially in a distant city, employees may feel the need to take a personal leave of absence to be sure their relative is getting the appropriate care. While that is an option, as an alternative, KPMG offers eldercare services that address these needs and allows our employees to return to work knowing their relative is being well cared for.

Our commitment to helping working families has not gone unnoticed. KPMG has earned a spot on Working Mother Media's List of 100 Best Companies for Working Mothers eleven times and in the top ten last year; we have made the Companies that Care Honor Roll five times, and for the past two years, Fortune Magazine named KPMG one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For.

Collectively, the programs I've described meet the needs of both our employees and our business. They demonstrate that we care about our employees and are committed to helping them balance work and life. These programs help us attract and retain key talent, which is critical to meeting clients' needs and to the overall success of the firm. At KPMG, retention rates and morale are up.

Thank you for this opportunity to share KPMG's views with you today.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. Thank you, Ms. Wankoff.

Congressman Bishop?

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much.

And to our four witnesses, thank you for your testimony and for the compelling stories that you have told.

Let me start with Ms. Wankoff, and let me first commend KPMG for their family-friendly policies.

In a previous life, I was a senior administrator of a college and our audit partner was KPMG, and I have to say that I found everyone with whom we interacted to be unfailingly professional, and very skilled and very helpful. I also found them to be very exacting; that is to say that they always challenged us to see to it that what we were doing was cost effective. So I have to assume that KPMG imposes the same standards, shall we say, internally as they do externally.

So can you tell me what kinds of assessment KPMG has undertaken that allow them to recognize that what they are doing has a favorable cost benefit for the company.

Ms. WANKOFF. Absolutely, Congressman. You are so right. We look at all sorts of metrics. One of the key metrics that we look at is retention. We are in a war for talent. We are always looking to hire the best people, and retain those people, and continue to develop them professionally so that they can meet the needs of our clients.

And we do know, especially on the maternity leave, that that is a crossroads in people's lives as in any personal crisis, and we want to make sure that we are retaining people through those crossroads. So we look at providing family-friendly benefits and leave of absences that meet those needs and allow those employees to come back to us and be productive and effective employees.

We see that we have had increased retention rates, our turnover continues to decrease, and over the past five years has decreased 40 percent, and over the last year an additional three percent. We believe it is the combination of family-friendly policies that help us retain these employees.

Mr. BISHOP. How would you describe the competitive environment in which you find yourselves? Are you competing for the best talent and winning, or are you finding some of your policies, because they may increase your costs somewhat, put you at a competitive disadvantage?

Ms. WANKOFF. We believe that we are always competing. We are competing for talent, and we are competing for clients, and we are competing in these economic times. But we do believe that our policies help us attack and retain those employees, make our employees effective and productive, and that allows us to be competitive with our clients as well.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much.

Ms. CONDOS, thank you. By the way, it is nice to see you looking so healthy. I am glad things for now are going well for you. You work at St. Charles Hospital. I am honored to represent St. Charles Hospital. I think they do a first-rate job in a very, very adverse climate and I thank you for being a part of the care that they deliver to patients.

It sounds to me as if both St. Charles and your coworkers were very, very supportive of the condition or the situation that you

found yourself in. How do you think you would have been affected or impacted had you not had such a supportive employer or such supportive coworkers?

Ms. CONDOS. They have been extremely supportive, and fortunately I haven't had to spend too much time thinking about that. I really don't know what we would do.

Similar to Mr. Blekas, my husband and I contemplated remortgaging the house, similar types of things, tapping into 401(k)s, living off of credit cards. We don't know because, in addition, we are doing some of that because of the additional medical costs. So it would be extremely difficult.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much.

I have time for one more question in this round. Let me ask Mr. Blekas.

First, let me say that your employer was my father's employer. Your union was my father's union, and so I thank you for being here this morning.

You made mention of having lost overtime. I sit here today because of overtime that had been provided as a result of the collective bargaining protection that my father had. He sent five kids through college primarily on overtime. I wouldn't have had the opportunities I had if it weren't for that.

Have you utilized all of the FMLA leave that you have in this year? Have you utilized all of your paid vacation time? And if so, what is your next alternative in the event that your family needs more from you than you can currently provide?

Mr. BLEKAS. I believe they gave me April, the end of April was like the end of the okay, you know, what they gave as my FMLA time where I can take the unpaid days off. I believe I had to file for an extension, which I haven't done. They kind of give you—I am not really sure where that date came about, but that was, I mean, because my wife is still going for treatments so you know.

Mr. BISHOP. But as far as you know, you have exhausted your FMLA time?

Mr. BLEKAS. Well, I did last year, and this year I am about to. So like I said, my wife isn't finished, and you know, being a part of the union, they have, you know, like Mrs. Condos' coworkers, they have helped as well even though they don't have the ability Verizon has to put it in. I am really proud of the guys I work with. Whether it is September 11 or someone getting ill, they are always there. You know, they are—I mean, I really believe they are the embodiment when you hear the term "family values." I am not too sure, you know, you get that from—usually it is just lip service, the word, and I think something like a paid FMLA would be the way to go as far as when you are talking family values.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. Thank you very much.

Ms. DOLAN, I was pleased that you support H.R. 5873, the Family Medical Leave Insurance Act, which I cosponsor, and will provide workers with 12 weeks of paid leave with the employee and employers contributing to an insurance fund. And States could do this. States could have an insurance fund that is matched by some degree with the employee and the employer.

So tell me why you favor—or do you favor the insurance, or do you favor that each State could put together their own plan with some incentive and help from the Federal Government as long as they knew the amount of a plan?

Ms. DOLAN. That is a difficult question, Congresswoman Woolsey. I think you have to look at the experience of California, and their laws have been in effect since July 1, in your State, of 2004. You know, New Jersey's won't go into effect until July 1 of 2009. The employees are contributing the cost of that part of temporary disability insurance for paid family leave.

I know the fund that you envision is a fund that would be jointly supported that the employees would be contributing to as well. I think that, you know, California has shown that that can be done successfully. I think that you folks are the experts in terms of do you think this will, you know, in terms of a national level, obviously it has to be implemented. Well, could be implemented nationally looking at the other social insurance programs.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. I always say if there is a will, there is a way.

Ms. DOLAN. Yes, I agree.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. I am okay with the State coming up with their own plan as long as it is a real plan. You know, we all know that State disability doesn't pay a person in full salary.

Ms. DOLAN. Right.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. But it has worked out that it is enough of an offset to a person's income that it makes the difference between going broke, living day-to-day and not.

Ms. CONDOS, it sounds like your employer and the people you work with are actually fantastic, and yours, too, George. Think of having friends in your workplace like that, that will give that much. But what do you think would have been different in your situation? I mean, kind of tell us how it would have worked if you had been able to count on paid leave.

Ms. CONDOS. Obviously, my leukemia diagnosis came as a shock because I had just returned from a maternity leave a few months prior to that and I had used up all of my time.

Within the first few days of my diagnosis, my mother even—you know, she was obviously distraught over this, and she says, Jul, you know, I will give you my retirement, we will remortgage the house, we will do whatever we need to do to make this work. She was just concerned for my health and beating this, and that is really what we would have to do. We would have to pull from all sources to make it work out because I have been out of work an extended period of time and I am still going through treatment. So it would have been extremely different if it weren't for my generous coworkers who donated their vacation time to me.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. Right. If you had paid family leave——

Ms. CONDOS. Well, then I wouldn't have to rely on my coworkers. I would just be able to use the paid family leave, of course.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. And, George, the same thing with you. You were saying that family values——

Mr. BLEKAS. It could also help keep the American dream alive, you know. It is another elusive thing like family values. The American dream is something you build. We live in the greatest country

in the world that can give all sorts of aid to all sorts of places. We can shoot million-dollar cruise missiles into the desert dirt somewhere. We can surely come up with the money to keep the American dream alive.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. Right. I think you are alluding to $90 billion a week.

Mr. BLEKAS. We have the funds. Charity starts at home.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. There you go.

Congressman?

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you.

Before I ask the next round of questions I just want to observe that we have been joined by Suffolk County Legislature Vivian Viloria-Fisher. Vivian, thank you very much for coming, and thank you for letting us use your workplace. We appreciate it.

Ms. DOLAN, can you tell us, briefly describe for us the paid family leave legislation or law that is currently in place in California and Washington or New Jersey. Take any one, and briefly describe it, and tell us if any one of them could serve as a model for national legislation.

Ms. DOLAN. Well, California, which has been in effect as I indicated for the past four years, the benefit rate—first of all, its duration is six weeks of paid family leave. They started at 12, and unfortunately it got whittled down to six. That, unfortunately, has been the model. Everyone in California that we are in collaboration with, and folks in New Jersey, New Jersey's law also had to be whittled down to six weeks, we would urge that at the Federal level that that 12 weeks be held onto. Certainly, we are fighting to do that here in New York State. We think the duration, certainly don't believe six weeks is long enough, that it needs to be 12 weeks.

And in California, the benefit rate with California is linked to their Workers' Compensation rate. And the benefit rate for 2008 in California for paid family leave is capped at $917 a week. And in New Jersey, the benefit rate when they did the numbers for 2008 is $524, a cap of $524 a week for 2008. And in both States, there is a requirement that an employee, if they have two weeks available to them of their own leave time, a combination they get of vacation days and sick days, up to two weeks. Both of these laws mandate that an employee uses two weeks of their own time before the start of the paid family leave. Obviously, this was an effort so that folks would only take it if they, in fact, legitimately needed it. That is why those provisions were built in.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much.

Ms. WANKOFF, KPMG is an international company. You have operations in over a hundred countries, and for many of those countries the paid family leave policies that you provide here in this country are, in effect, incorporated into the law or at least the practices of the countries elsewhere in the world.

To what extent has the experience that KPMG has had in countries that do, in fact, provide paid leave for their employees influence the judgments that you have made with respect to the policies you put in place here in this country?

Ms. WANKOFF. Congressman, it is difficult for me to speak on a global basis. My responsibilities are primarily domestic, and we do

look at our global policies, but we do very strongly take into account the market that we are in as we formulate policies for the U.S.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you.

Ms. CONDOS, you also describe in your testimony your father's circumstances. It doesn't sound like they worked out quite as well as the circumstances that worked out for you thus far. Do you know if he had any family leave options, or if he had the ability to take paid time off, unpaid time off? Did he work for a company that allowed his fellow coworkers to loan him their time off? Do you think of those things?

Ms. CONDOS. Yeah, I did talk to him about it. When I came into my circumstance, I was curious what he did, but unfortunately, he worked for an employer that was not supportive at all, and he did not get anything whatsoever from his employer, or coworkers, or anything like that. So he had no other option.

Mr. BISHOP. Was it a large employer?

Ms. CONDOS. No, it wasn't. No. He worked for a dry cleaning company, so it was a small company.

Mr. BISHOP. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. Well, thank you.

While we are here, I keep thinking about when I was a single mom with one-, three- and five-year-old children. My children's father had abandoned us. He was nuts for leaving me, no offense. I mean, you know, he had to leave.

Mr. BISHOP. The chairwoman will be available to discuss this.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. He was emotionally ill and wouldn't get help. All right, so I have these three children that I am responsible for. So, of course, I go to work. I mean, with all that was going on in our life, the worst part of it was that, in the first 12 months, I had 13 different child care situations. One-, three- and five-year-old children, the effect on them had to be horrendous.

I went to work for the same people I ended up being the human resources manager for when they left and started a start-up technology company, and we grew from 12 people to over 800. You can imagine that our human resources policies were a lot like KPMG. And this was 35 years ago.

So there is no question, and I watch this young company grow with good policies, and then I watched them be taken over by a huge corporation who walked in and took away all my policies. Then I watched me leave, of course. I wasn't going to sit around for that.

And I find myself on this committee as the Chair of the Workforce Protections Subcommittee after 20 years of human resources work and professionalism and knowing absolutely that my job was to take care of the employees like you do, Ms. Wankoff. I mean, I am so proud to know you and to know your company.

I can say to you as the chairwoman of this committee, it is absolutely clear we are not doing enough, and that we will do better. I can promise that because I know the sense of my colleagues, Mr. Bishop, George Miller, who runs the big committee. We know that the United States of America is going to be measured on how we

take care of those most in need, and we are going to make it happen.

I thank you for being here today. You have been magnificent. I wish we had a film of you and we can take you all over the country. This has been a great, great panel. Be prepared to be invited back down to D.C. for something. If you can possibly do it, we would sure want to have you and hear you again.

Good luck, Ms. Condos. Good luck, Mr. Blekas. You guys are really facing hard stuff, but I don't want you to be alone in this. You aren't with your family and your friends, but know that some of us get the bigger picture. We will be there. I promise. Thank you very much.

And thank you again.

Mr. BISHOP. If I may, I certainly want to thank you, Chairwoman Woolsey, as I said, for this hearing but, much more importantly, for your leadership on this issue and so many other issues that have important impact on the lives of the people who keep this country working. And Mr. Blekas talked about those who are looking for their piece of the American dream. Your leadership is inspirational, and I thank you for that.

And I want to thank our panel for testifying before us today. And I want to let you know that, as a Congress, we are determined to find answers to some of the problems that are the most taxing for the working families of our country. This is one of them. It will not come quickly or easily, but I am confident it will come.

Thank you all very, very much.

Chairwoman WOOLSEY. Thank you.

As previously ordered, members will have 14 days to submit additional materials for the hearing record. Any member who wishes to submit follow-up questions in writing to the witnesses should coordinate with majority staff within 14 days.

[Additional submission from Mr. Bishop follows:]

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT,
THE CITY OF NEW YORK, BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN,
New York, NY, June 9, 2008.

Congressman Bishop, members of the House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Labor's Committee on Workforce Protections Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to comment how we in government can create and promote work/life balance for employees within our own municipalities and across the country.

As Manhattan Borough President I hear from New York City residents about the need for a paid family leave policy that would allow working adults to care for their families during and following life-changing events. As a result, my office has explored ways in which New York City and New York State can make taking leave a truly affordable option for workers and their families—we hosted focus groups for employees and employers on their need for leave and the obstacles that keep them from providing paid leave, respectively; we released a report recommending ways for the city and state governments to promote work/family balance; we held a forum on paid leave at which New Jersey Labor Commissioner David Socolow talked about how New Jersey passed their paid leave legislation.

Through these efforts it has become increasingly clear to me that we in government cannot be apathetic in our approach to implementing critically needed paid leave policies. Paid family leave is a human issue and an economic issue—it cuts across all lines and unites people of every political stripe—employees need and should have paid leave. Young men and women starting their careers and starting their families need paid time off from work following the birth or adoption of a child to help balance those often competing demands. At the same time, people are living longer. New York City has 2 million seniors whose working children and grand-

children are likely be called upon to care for them. These New Yorkers also desperately need paid leave.

Many employers who recognize the need for and benefits of paid family leave have found that offering paid leave is a boon to their business. Employees with paid leave are often more committed to their employers, which in turn positively impacts their business' bottom line by reducing turnover and increasing retention rates.

However, small businesses, which are important to the city's economy and create most of our new jobs, told my office during a focus group that while they want to provide paid leave, they cannot afford it. Here is one place where the government must step in by implementing a paid leave policy that would support these small businesses while providing the financial safety net that employees need to take time off.

In the absence of a federal requirement for paid leave, local governments are taking the lead. New Jersey, California, and Washington State all require some form of paid family leave—funded by employee contributions to an expanded Temporary Disability Insurance. The states with paid family leave did not have to recreate the wheel—they worked within the existing confines of the Federal Medical Leave Act and simply instituted a method for providing some level of pay for those that take leave. It's an important first step that raises the bar for other states, but a piecemeal approach to paid leave policy is inadequate.

Just like New York's fear of being left behind by New Jersey—fear that will hopefully prompt the legislature to finally take action on our paid family leave legislation—the United States risks being left behind economically and competitively by the European Union and the many countries with family friendly work policies. One look across the Atlantic is enough to show us how far we have to go to adequately support American families. And if we do not implement paid leave policies nationwide, we are going to wake up one day and see that we have been left behind.

Paid family leave is about taking care of ourselves and our loved ones. It is about people making decisions about where they are going to work and raise their families. It is about having a competitive economy and the ability to retain the best workforce. And it is the right thing to do.

Thank you.

SCOTT M. STRINGER,
Borough President.

Without objection, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:45 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]