

## SENATE LABOR AND INDUSTRY COMMITTEE

### **Senate Bill 580 – The Pennsylvania Family and Medical Leave Insurance Act**

PSEA and its 180,000 members are pleased and encouraged by the Senate's attention to the issue of paid family leave. Nearly all of us are affected by health emergencies, the need to care for a loved one or the birth of a child at some point in our lives. Unfortunately, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is simply not enough for most of us to meet these experiences and maintain financial stability, as well as the job protection that FMLA has traditionally provided. We believe it is time for state policy to evolve beyond FMLA and prioritize the needs of Pennsylvania's families in order to effectively recruit and retain world class educators, to provide Education Support Professionals (ESPs) the respect they deserve, and to keep Pennsylvania competitive with neighboring states.

Pennsylvania is facing a looming teacher shortage. While several factors, such as low starting salaries, high student debt loads and challenging working conditions contribute to this crisis, the lack of paid family leave cannot be ignored. More than 75 percent of America's teachers are women. And, it is these same women who are most often responsible for caring for their children, spouses and aging parents. Studies overwhelmingly prove that women with limited paid family leave are more likely to leave employment after childbirth or a health emergency, while those with paid family leave are more likely to return. A paid family leave program has the potential to help school districts attract and retain quality teachers, and to help slow Pennsylvania's growing teacher shortage.

The lack of paid family leave also impacts ESPs in our schools. Professional and temporary professional school employees are fortunate to have a statutory requirement in the Public School Code for a minimum of 10 paid sick days per year. This time is often used by people to plan for the expansion of their families or care for a family member if allowed by a school district policy. However, ESPs are not statutorily provided the same level of certainty. Public employees are lucky in that they have unions representing them and committing resources to bargaining for better benefits. We have made progress over the years to structure contract language that can be more supportive of families. However, we believe that SB 580 lays a more solid foundation for supporting ALL employees in Pennsylvania. It also provides all school employees with the peace of mind to know that there is financial support system available if an emergency occurs. For many education support professionals, this could be vitally important.

Finally, eight states and the District of Columbia have already enacted some form of paid family leave that cover bonding with a new child (birth, adoption, foster), caring for a family member with a serious health condition, caring for a person's own serious health condition or caring for service member due to qualifying exigency leave. Pennsylvania has fallen behind a number of these states in the recruitment and maintenance of educators. By pooling together resources of a minimal payroll deduction, Pennsylvania can support both employers and families and ensure we do not lose our best and brightest to neighboring states

One area of concern for PSEA is that the language in the bill does not definitively provide people with the option of exercising the use of their employer-provided benefits, which may offer full-pay. The employee could use the time in part, or depending on the amount accumulated, in place of filing a claim through the proposed

insurance program. The employee should be able to choose if/when they want to use the state program for a period not to exceed the timeframes under the proposal. PSEA has prepared language to resolve this concern, which we intend to provide to Sen. Laughlin and the Senate Labor and Industry Committee.

Again, PSEA appreciates the committee's attention to this issue and, for all the reasons outlined above, we hope that it will take up SB 580 this year. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

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