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**Written remarks for Erin Bennett Leighton, MomsRising Campaign Director
Colorado House Finance Committee Hearing on the FMLI Act
March 7th, 2018**

Thank you Mister Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Erin Bennett Leighton, and I am a Campaign Director at MomsRising, a national organization of more than a million people across the nation and 25,000 here in Colorado - working to increase family economic security, decrease discrimination against women and moms, and build a nation where businesses and families can thrive. We urge you to support the FMLI Act.

Over 8,000 of our members have taken action in support of paid family and medical leave for all Coloradans. We hear every day from our members that we need an insurance plan that provides a meaningful length of leave, is accessible to all working people, covers all families, and is affordable, cost-effective, and sustainable for workers, employers, and taxpayers. The FMLI Act is exactly the program that we all need and deserve.

We hear from members like Laura from Denver. She was one of the lucky ones - she qualified for FMLA through her employer and had built up sick time and vacation, but she only had enough paid time for 6 weeks. Unable to afford unpaid time off, Laura returned to work after just 6 weeks with her newborn. The transition was very hard for Laura, who is a single mother and sole provider and caretaker. After months of struggling, Laura was diagnosed with postpartum depression.

Laura said: *"I can't help but think what a help it would have been to have those full 12 weeks paid - to have that time with my new baby and adjust to motherhood and to not be penalized by using my paid time off. What a relief it would have been to just focus on the important job of raising a [baby] without worries of financial hardship."*

1 in 4 mothers return to work within 10 days of giving birth.¹ But studies have shown that longer leave periods are associated with health benefits for new mothers, including declines in depressive symptoms, a reduction in the likelihood of severe depression, and improvement in overall health.² In addition, time at home with newborns, infants, and toddlers gives parents the time they need to breastfeed, attend well-child medical visits, and ensure that their children receive all necessary immunizations.³

We've also heard from our members that working families need a paid family and medical leave policy that is more than just maternity and paternity leave.

¹ <http://inthesetimes.com/article/18151/the-real-war-on-families>

² Pinka Chatterji and Sara Markowitz, Family Leave After Childbirth and the Health of New Mothers. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2008. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w14156>

³ Sheila B. Kamerman, Parental Leave Policies: The Impact on Child Well-Being. In Peter Moss and Margaret O'Brien, Eds., International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research 2006, 16-21. London, UK: Department of Trade and Industry, 2006. Retrieved from http://www.leavenetwork.org/fileadmin/Leavenetwork/Annual_reviews/2006_annual_report.pdf

Leanne from New Castle told us about an extremely challenging time for her family, when her husband was laid off just 3 weeks after their son was born. And at that same time, Leanne's mother was battling cancer. They were surviving on just one salary, and without paid time off, Leanne was forced to choose between putting food on the table and providing critical care for her new baby and her mother.

Andrea from Aurora is terminally ill, and her husband cannot take time off to care for her, which has forced Andrea to cancel some appointments and not receive the care she desperately needs.

Kelly from Denver has a daughter with special education needs. Paid family leave would provide Kelly with intermittent leave so that she could manage her daughter's appointments.

Kris from Littleton lost a good job with benefits just because she needed to take time to care for her mother.

Caregiving can cause significant financial, physical and emotional strain. Of caregivers who take time off to fulfill their responsibilities at home, 48 percent report losing income.⁴ Of caregivers who leave the workforce, half said they did so because their jobs did not allow the flexibility they needed to work and provide care.⁵ And caregiving takes more than a financial toll: Caregivers experience high levels of stress, depression and frustration, and suffer from higher rates of chronic disease⁶, slower healing, and diminished immune response.⁷

It is time to make paid leave a reality for everyone. Whether it's to care for a newborn you swear already smiles, a parent who is ill, or a spouse battling cancer - being there for family is what matters, and Colorado families shouldn't have to give up a paycheck to do it. MomsRising and our 25,000 members in Colorado urge you to vote Yes on the FMLI Act. Thank you.

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⁴ Aumann, K., Galinsky, E., Sakai, K., et. al. (2010). The Elder Care Study: Everyday Realities and Wishes for Change. Families and Work Institute Publication. Retrieved 4 November 2015, from http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/elder_care.pdf

⁵ Matos, K. (2014). Highlights from the 2014 Older Adult Caregiver Study. Families and Work Institute Publication. Retrieved 4 November 2015, from <http://www.familiesandwork.org/downloads/2014-Older-Adult-Caregiver-Study.pdf>

⁶ Ho, A., Collins, S., Davis, K., & Doty, M. (2005). A Look at Working-Age Caregivers Roles, Health Concerns, and Need for Support. The Commonwealth Fund Publication. Retrieved 3 November 2015, from <https://www.wiserwomen.org/images/imagefiles/Caregiver%20Roles%20and%20Needs.pdf>

⁷ Lovell, B., & Wetherell, M. A. (2011). The cost of caregiving: Endocrine and immune implications in elderly and nonelderly caregivers. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 35(6), 1342-1352.