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**EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE**

**Congressman George Miller, Chairman**

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Press Office, 202-226-0853

**Chairwoman Woolsey Statement at Subcommittee Hearing on  
H.R. 2339, the Family Income to Respond to Significant  
Transitions Act, and H.R. 2460, the Healthy Families Act**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – *Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. Lynn Woolsey (D-CA), chairwoman of the House Subcommittee on Workforce Protections Subcommittee for a subcommittee hearing on “H.R. 2339, the Family Income to Respond to Significant Transitions Act, and H.R. 2460, the Healthy Families Act.”*

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I want to thank everyone for coming to this legislative hearing on “HR 2339, the FIRST (Family Income to Respond to Significant Transitions) Act and HR 2460, the Healthy Families Act.”

Today, most people work outside the home and commute long hours, so balancing work and family is a very real challenge for millions of workers in this country.

Several years ago, I was a working mother with 4 children.

And it was a struggle to meet their needs as well as the responsibilities of my job.

Early on I didn’t have sick leave and certainly not family and medical leave.

But when I could afford to take time off to care for a sick child, the pressure from the workplace was overwhelming.

We are now in the 21st century, and workers should not have to choose between their jobs or their families, but they still are forced to make those choices.

The recent outbreak of the H1N1 virus (Swine Flu) has additionally exposed the significant problems that are created for workers when they and their family members need time off to deal with illness.

Public health officials rightly tell them to stay home from work and to keep their kids home from school.

But can they afford to take time off to care for themselves and/or their families?

The answer for at least 50 million workers is “no.”

The U.S. lags behind the rest of the world in providing paid family leave and sick days to employees.

It is unacceptable that this country, which is the number one economy in the world, can barely compete with developing nations when it comes to paid leave and sick days.

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that provides unpaid job-protected family and medical leave is virtually the only national leave policy.

I was a new Member of Congress when we passed the FMLA over 15 years ago.

At the time it was a great achievement, and over the years we have learned a lot.

While more than 100 millions leaves have been taken under the FMLA, most workers can't take advantage of its provisions because they cannot afford to take unpaid leave.

And because---in the case of illness--- leave is permitted only for a serious medical condition, ordinary sick leave is not permitted.

Representative DeLauro is here today to describe HR 2460, the Healthy Families Act in detail, but I want to take a few minutes to stress how critical paid sick days are to workers.

Currently, millions of workers go to work when they are sick, because they simply cannot afford to lose pay or in some cases their jobs.

This is not only bad for workers and their families, but also for employers.

Thirty years ago, I was a human resource manager.

When people were sick, we wanted them to stay home so they could recover from their illnesses and return to work feeling healthy and productive.

It boggles my mind that 30 years later that any employer would rather have employees come to work sick than provide them the time off they need to recover.

There are serious public health consequences as well: food workers rarely have paid sick days, but as Dr. Bhatia will tell us in his testimony, infected and sick workers are often a cause of food borne disease outbreaks, which cause thousands of people to become ill. The Healthy Families Act fixes the problem by providing workers with up to 7 days of paid sick leave.

The other bill we are considering today is HR 2339, the FIRST Act, which I introduced this spring.

This legislation provides grants to the states to implement and administer their paid family leave programs.

The grants can be used for start-up costs for new programs, or in the case of programs already in operation, for such activities as outreach and education.

Currently, only 3 states have paid family leave programs: California, New Jersey and Washington state.

And a handful of others provide temporary disability benefits, which also provides some wage replacement for pregnancy and childbirth.

The FIRST Act grants will assist existing programs and will serve as an incentive to other states to develop paid family leave programs of their own.

For a small investment of federal funds (the act authorizes \$1.5 billion), we can help create and improve state programs and help millions of workers balance their work and family lives.

We know for example that when a parent is able to take time to bond with his or her child, it is better for the child and for the parent as well.

And when a worker is able to take time to care for an elderly parent, it may enable that parent to stay in his or her home.

I am a strong supporter of a national policy on paid leave and commend Representative Maloney on HR 626, the Federal Employees Parental Leave Act, which passed the House and provides 4 weeks of paid leave for federal workers.

I am also an original cosponsor of Pete Stark's legislation to provide paid leave on a national basis.

The FIRST Act, however, is an essential step to achieving our ultimate goal.

Not only will the first act assist families who desperately need paid leave now; it will help put in place an infrastructure for the administration of a national paid leave program.

Some will argue that in this economic climate we can't afford to pay for a grant program and or put an additional mandate on employers to provide paid sick days.

But economists tell us that this is precisely the time to act.

They tell us that these policies will be good for the national economy and will give workers the assistance they need in uncertain times.

And we know that employers benefit financially when they support their workers through tough times.

Again thank you for coming.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel of witnesses.

I now defer to Ranking Member Price for his opening statement.

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