

**TESTIMONY OF JULIENNE CONDOS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE PROTECTIONS
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR**

“Family-Friendly Leave Policies: How Workers Balance Work and Family”

June 9, 2008

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.