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February 7, 2023

To: Members of the House Labor and Industry Finance and Policy Committee

Re: AARP Support of HF 2; Paid Family Medical Leave

Dear Chair Nelson and Members of the Committee,

AARP strongly supports Representative Richardson's House File 2, establishing a paid family and medical leave program. Paid leave benefits would help thousands of Minnesotans support their spouses, aging parents, and other loved one's while protecting their financial security.

AARP has repeatedly called for state lawmakers to support working family caregivers and urge you to pass a paid leave program this year. With the option to take paid leave, caregivers, especially women, can stay in the workforce longer. It is estimated that one in 5 women leave the workforce earlier because of caregiving responsibilities and lose an estimated \$324,000 in wages, benefits, and retirement income.

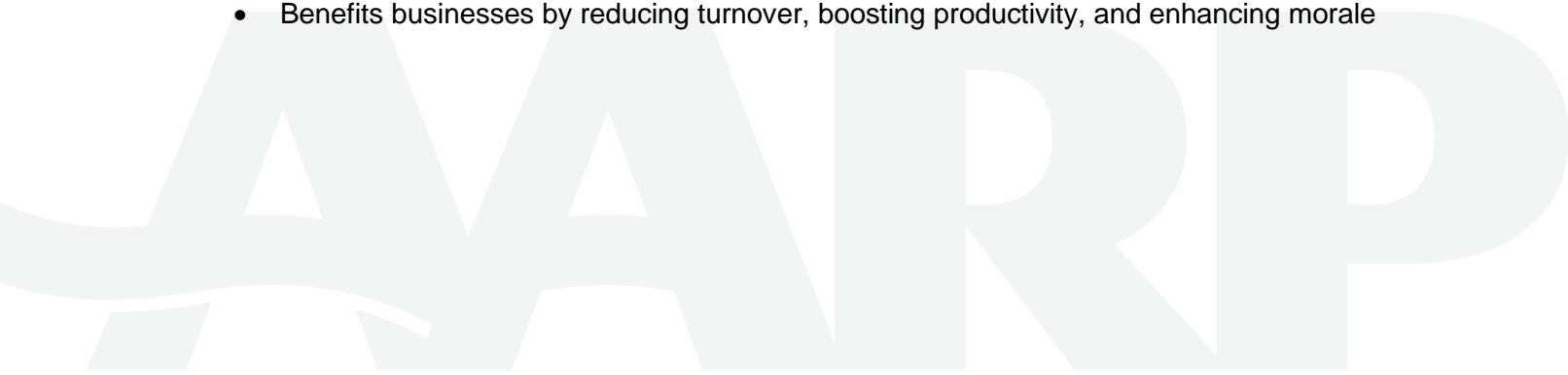
Family caregivers are less likely to be offered paid leave by an employer – nearly 6 in 10 say their employer does not provide paid family leave. This makes it very difficult for them to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities, whether driving a loved one to a doctor's appointment, taking time off to help someone recovering from surgery, or assisting with activities of daily living such as eating or dressing for a more extended period.

Minnesota's family caregivers are the backbone of our long-term care system and play an essential role in caring for their loved ones and delaying expensive nursing home care. The economic contribution of Minnesota's 640,000 unpaid family caregivers is estimated to be \$8.6 billion.

Despite the clear financial contributions of caregivers, their emotionally, physically, and financially strenuous work is not recognized with pay when they need to take time off work to care for loved ones.

The benefits of implementing policies that provide financial support to caregivers are clear:

- Allows older Minnesotans to age in the comfort of their homes and communities
- Retains women's participation in the workforce
- Reduces reliance on nursing home which are often paid for by taxpayers
- Benefits businesses by reducing turnover, boosting productivity, and enhancing morale



Passing a state-paid family leave program is essential in supporting their critical work. Thank you in advance for your support of this critical piece of legislation. If you have questions, please get in touch with AARP Advocacy's Director, Mary Jo George, at mjgeorge@arp.org or 651-271-6586.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy McLeer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cathy McLeer
State Director, AARP Minnesota

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Minnesota House File 2 addressing the need for Paid Family and Medical Leave in our state.

My name is Toni Kay Mangskau. I live in Rochester and am a volunteer for AARP, Isaiah and the National Patient Advocate Foundation.

Through the years, I have been caregiver for 5 family members. I shared caregiving responsibilities with my siblings when my dad was diagnosed with end stage heart and lung disease and when my mom was diagnosed with cancer. When my parents' health started to decline, I became the guardian for my developmentally disabled brother. He has ongoing, significant health issues. I officially became a member of the sandwich generation. Caring for my kids with disabling health issues, aging parents and brother. I have done all of this while working full-time.

My role as a family caregiver has been a financial strain. During a 9-month period in 2017, I went without one-third of my yearly income due to unpaid time off from work. I have had to file for bankruptcy in the past.

In addition to the financial strain, there's also been an emotional strain. When my mom was in hospice, my family and I were so burnt out with trying to juggle work and figuring out who could afford to miss work. With all of this juggling of our work schedules, my mom died alone without family at her bedside. My belief is if we would have had a Paid Family and Medical Leave law in place, my family would have been at her side in her last moments of life.

Unfortunately, my family's story is not uncommon. I work with cancer patients and their families and hear of the same type of experience. Senate File 2 will help ensure that every working Minnesotan can access paid leave protection when needed. This includes our neighbors striving to enter the workforce through the Minnesota Family Investment Program.

I, like so many others, would do anything for loved ones. The value of a family's emotional support and presence during a loved one's illness cannot be measured, and it should not be degraded or punished by the fear of financial difficulty.

It's time for Minnesota lawmakers to pass a paid family and medical leave program that is **comprehensive, accessible and not dependent on whether your employer can offer it**. So many family caregivers are counting on you.

Toni Kay Mangskau
Rochester, MN.



**Testimony Before the House Labor and Industry Finance and Policy Committee
In Support of Paid Family & Medical Leave (HF2)
Submitted by Paurvi Bhatt, MPH
February 7, 2023**

My name is Paurvi Bhatt. I live in Plymouth, Minnesota; was raised in Minnesota, and am here to share my experience as an only child, a working daughter, family caregiver, and as a second-generation Indian American immigrant, who cared for her aging parents until they died. This testimony is dedicated to my parents – Harshad and Rekha Bhatt – proud Minnesotans and first generation Indian American immigrants who came to the US in the early 1960s. Based on our family story, my experience as a family caregiver, and as a leader in healthcare, I urge you today to pass the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act.

My 25-year caregiving journey began in 1998, when my father was suddenly diagnosed with early onset dementia. He was 58. I was 28. A few years later, our situation escalated when my mother’s cancer re-emerged, and her cardiac and lung conditions worsened. Our Indian community in Minnesota didn’t know how to support dementia, advanced cancer and lung issues at home, nor how elder care gets managed. You see, immigrants in my parents’ era did not get to see their own parents grow old in real time. So, before I knew it, I became my parents’ caregiver, and they became my dependents. I had to reorganize my career priorities to help our family face our new reality.

Years later, after my father died, my mom and I lived together until she passed away last year. I worked remotely for over two years, struggling to care for mom while we sheltered in place due to the pandemic. Finding vaccinated, masked, and paid home health workers to help me was difficult. I finally had no choice but to take a long-term leave of absence.

These decisions to prioritize care come with significant tradeoffs. With no siblings or partner, I struggled to protect my own income, health insurance, and retirement savings. I cobbled together limited time and flexibility to keep my career afloat while translating doctor calls, navigating business travel, clearing up family confusion, and making critical financial decisions.

Many of my employers were compassionate, but they did not know how to support me. For years, I managed our situation across cultures and languages, and a rubrics cube of benefit plans and time off policies. Early in my career, when I was pressured to prioritize work over family, I would have to remind my managers that FMLA existed to protect my job. Later in my

career, I received greater support from companies who knew caregiving was part of my story. I know this flexibility is not given to many caregivers in the public and private sector who work. That is why I am here today.

I'm sure there is a version of my story happening in your family today. Each of us knows the selfless mother, daughter, sister, niece, or cousin who made the sacrifice to care for a loved one. I am here to remind us that she does it at a cost. Women, particularly women of color, assume family care responsibilities so quickly, and so often, without support. When we step into care, we step out of the workforce, without pay, and deliver care without reimbursement. Family caregivers are the backbone of our care system – a system that cannot continue to rest on each family figuring out care on their own, without help. FMLA alone is not enough to keep families strong while they face these challenges.

Minnesota leads the way with world-class health systems, incredible global companies, and the largest healthcare payers in the world. It's crucial that we join the world and provide paid family and medical leave for public and private sector workers.

I urge you to pass Paid Family and Medical Leave. Our diverse tapestry of Minnesotans who care for their loved ones are counting on you.