

ASHLIE:

Good morning, Madame Chair and Committee Members:

My name is Ashlie Kennedy and my husband John and I live with our daughters in St. Paul. I am currently a State employee working for the Minnesota Judicial Branch. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of House File 2.

On March 15, 2021, after 72 hours of labor, our daughter, Blair Evelyn Kennedy, died and was born. At 31 weeks gestation she weighed 3 pounds, 8 ounces, and was 17 inches long. She had beautiful dark hair and gorgeous blue eyes, almost an exact replica of her two older sisters. We only had four hours with Blair before we had to say goodbye. There are no words to describe the pain of delivering a baby who will never come home.

Since Blair's death we have found an entire community of parents whose children have died at birth or in infancy. Many of these parents lack access to resources like paid leave to recover from childbirth and to grieve their children. This lack of leave is unconscionable and also dangerous to the health of the birthing parent.

In my case, I ran out of sick time and asked to access my paid parental leave, leave that Human Resources told me I could access as a State employee. Even though I was expressly told that I met all of the eligibility requirements for paid parental leave, the Judicial Branch denied my leave stating that the unwritten intent of the policy is for parents to bond with their baby. The Judicial Branch has no paid leave policy to recover from childbirth. So one week after Blair's funeral, and just three weeks after her death and birth, I returned to work.

JOHN:

Good morning, Madame Chair and Committee Members. My name is John Kennedy.

Parents whose children die should not have to return to work just days after attending their baby's funeral. Parents who are able to bring their children home should not have to return to work immediately. Whether caring for yourself or a loved one, House File 2 will ensure that all working families in Minnesota will have access to Paid Family and Medical Leave. This benefits all Minnesotans. Your constituents. Employers and employees alike.

While Ashlie's story is unique in that her employer, the Judicial Branch, has a paid leave policy and Ashlie was wrongly denied leave under the policy, many workers in Minnesota have no such benefit at all. Too many of our friends and family have had to return to work after pregnancy, childbirth, and the loss of a child because they are unprotected and unsupported.

House File 2 is an investment in the health and wellbeing of the people of Minnesota. It will provide much needed relief to families who suffer the real tax of a system that does not provide the basic support of paid family and medical leave. This Bill is necessary to protect families including those who experience child loss.