

February 6, 2007

HB 1658 Family and Medical Leave Insurance
Commerce and Labor Committee Hearing Testimony

Nicole

I just wanted to share my story with you about why I feel Family and Medical Leave Insurance is so necessary.

I just had my baby the day before Halloween, and I knew I'd be out of my office for a couple months. I had already invested in an accident insurance policy so I knew I'd be able to have some income during that time - just enough to pay the bills. My husband is working part time and going to school full time. We knew it'd be tight for a while, but we didn't know just how tight. The baby's birth, although it went smoothly, ended up costing over \$3000 and I had to go back to work two weeks earlier than I had planned. Luckily, my baby learned to use his bottle before I had to go back, but he only figured it out the night before. It was much too early for me to be leaving him and just a few more days would have made a huge difference.

My company claims to be a family company, but when I pointed out that the handbook says that women on maternity leave will get the same benefits as all full-time employees, they decided to change it so that I would not get my holidays paid for, and that I would not get to use my vacation days intermittently - I had to use them all at once. Despite my pointing out how much it would help our financial situation and how little it would inconvenience them to allow me to do this, my company insisted that they were being very generous in paying for my insurance during my time gone. Even though this is legally required of them, they believed that they were doing me a favor, and therefore, they could change the handbook at their will to further cast a burden on our finances.

Having a baby was a wonderfully joyous event, but parents should have more time with their young children. My husband was only able to take 2 days off of work and school in order to spend time with the baby and me when the baby first arrived because we were so strapped for money. And I'm a fortunate one: at least I qualified for maternity leave at all, and at least I have a job with health insurance that paid out a sizable amount of the delivery costs, and at least I have a husband who (although he goes to school) is able to help with the baby and mortgage. I can't imagine how hard it must be for women working at a little job who can be fired when they have a baby. I thank God for my child, but I hope the US can make some changes soon and join the rest of the world in compensating mothers and families when there is a newborn in order to lessen the stress and ease the transition of a new addition into the family.

Thanks. -Nicole