

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

Tracie Guy-Decker
Baltimore, MD 21229

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB375/SB211
Labor and Employment - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program - Establishment
(Time to Care Act of 2021)

TO: Chair Davis, Vice Chair Dumais, and members of the House Economic Matters Committee
FROM: Tracie Guy-Decker

I am a resident of Baltimore City in the 41st District. I'm a mom, a sister, a daughter, and a wife. In particular, I am a Navy-wife. It is from this perspective—of military spouse—that I am providing testimony in support of HB375/SB211, Labor and Employment - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program Establishment (Time to Care Act of 2021).

My husband is a Chief Petty Officer on active duty in the United States Navy. He is currently stationed for a fifteen-month tour in Manama, Bahrain. When he received orders to Bahrain, we had about 90 days to make arrangements and say goodbyes. At the time, I was lucky enough to work at a job that provided leave, so I was able to take time off from work to deal with the many logistical tasks one faces when one's partner will be gone for over a year. Cancel the cellphone, sell one of the cars, arrange transportation for the days he was on drop-off or pick-up duty for our second-grade daughter. And more important than those arrangements, I was able to take time to spend time with him before our forced separation.

As hard as our separation is and was, we are privileged compared to some military families. Service members who are on deployment, rather than a tour of duty as my husband is, don't have the chance to communicate as frequently as we do. And my counterparts in the Reserve or the National Guard can face the logistical and emotional upheaval I went through with as little as 30-days' notice.

Fewer than 1% of U.S. adults are active duty service members, and their families bear burdens that I never imagined before I became a military family-member. As a society, we claim to highly value military families. I know from experience that "Thank you for your service" is an oft-repeated phrase to service members and their families. Our policies should reflect that value, which is what the Time to Care Act does.

When a service member is called up for deployment, their partners are faced not just with the emotional toll of that impending separation, but also with the logistical challenges of re-

arranging the rhythms of their household. In addition to the childcare and transportation arrangements I faced, some of my fellow military spouses may need to make alternate arrangements to care for the service member's parent who lives with them. When our partners are deployed, we military spouses have any number of time-consuming logistics to figure out, such as arranging bank accounts for being abroad, shipping personal items, putting a car in storage, or suspending phone service. If you work retail, customer service, on a factory floor, or as an ER nurse, how are you supposed to find the time to address these realities?

And please don't forget the emotional toll. Imagine your partner was suddenly going to be away for six to twelve months, with a risk of not coming home at all. Imagine having young children who are scared and don't understand what is happening. Families should have time to be together in the days and weeks leading up to deployment, without risking financial ruin. When that service member gets their "rest and recuperation" (R&R) leave with an opportunity to visit home, their working loved ones should be able to take time off to be with them, regardless of their employer's paid vacation policy. Imagine a service member comes home from their deployment with a significant injury or mental health condition that needs to be addressed. Their working loved one needs this Time to Care.

The Time to Care Act includes specific provisions that address these unique challenges, burdens, and realities faced by military families. In Judaism, the Torah commands that "When people get married, they shall not go out with the army or be assigned to it for any purpose; they shall be exempt for one year for the sake of their household." My Jewish tradition values military families, and so does the Time to Care Act.

Our public policies should be shaped to protect us all. All the more so, those whose loved ones protect the country. Every military family should have the benefit of paid leave that I was able to access. Military service always takes a toll on service members' families but we don't have to allow a lack of paid leave to compound those sacrifices.

I urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB375/SB211 to pass the Time to Care Act of 2021.