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Whitehouse & Reed Introduce Legislation to Support State Paid Leave Programs During COVID-19 Crisis

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senators Sheldon Whitehouse and Jack Reed, a member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, today announced that they have introduced the State Paid Leave for America Now (PLAN) Act to reimburse state paid family and medical leave programs for the cost of benefits for circumstances related to COVID-19. **Five states, including Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia have sustainable, long-term paid family and medical leave programs in place.**

“This pandemic has demonstrated more clearly than ever that paid family leave is an important element of a humane and healthy society,” said Senator Whitehouse. “In the absence of a commonsense national paid leave policy, states like Rhode Island that have led the way with their own leave systems should be provided federal support to keep those programs afloat during a national health crisis.

“Workers shouldn’t have to choose between paying their rent or infecting others by showing up to work when they are ill or caring for a sick child. And states like Rhode Island that have stepped up and enacted cost-effective policies to ensure workers have paid sick and family leave should not be disadvantaged when it comes to federal assistance to combat COVID-19,” said Senator Reed. “I commend Senator Whitehouse for his national leadership on paid leave to support families, businesses, and communities. With so many teetering on the financial edge during this pandemic, this legislation will help ensure states receive the resources they deserve to help communities and provide pandemic-related paid leave.”

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) included historic provisions requiring some employers to provide limited paid sick days and paid leave for certain purposes during the current COVID-19 crisis. However, these provisions were extremely limited in scope. In contrast, workers in states with existing paid leave programs were able to access their state programs.

“While the Families First Coronavirus Response Act established a limited, temporary federal paid leave law for the first time in our nation’s history, it left out tens of millions of employees,” said Rhode Island State Senator Gayle Goldin, who led the successful effort to create a statewide paid family leave program in 2013. “Thankfully, Rhode Islanders have access to paid leave through Temporary Disability and Caregiver Insurance, our state-run social insurance. It’s helped thousands of Rhode Islanders when they need to quarantine or care for a loved one. I applaud Senators Whitehouse and Reed for acknowledging what an important resource our state-run social insurance is for Rhode Islanders. This additional federal funding would be a boost to workers and their families when they need it most.”

The State PLAN Act would level the playing field between states, helping states keep workers safe and healthy. Under the legislation, states would receive federal reimbursement for the cost of benefits for individuals taking paid leave under their state program because of a COVID-19 diagnosis or quarantine, or caregiving for someone diagnosed or quarantined because of COVID-19. Eligibility for reimbursement for benefits and associated administrative costs would span from January 27, 2020, when COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency, through the end of 2021.

The State PLAN Act was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congressman Jimmy Gomez (CA-34).

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