

To: House Committee on Early Childhood & Family Supports
From: Dana Hepper, Director of Policy & Program, Children's Institute
Date: March 22nd, 2017
Re: House Bill 3087, Paid Family Leave

Members of the committee, my name is Dana Hepper. I am the Director of Policy & Program at the Children's Institute. Children's Institute is a statewide organization that advocates for investments in young children that will improve Kindergarten Readiness and Third Grade Success.

Children's Institute focuses on the first 8 years of life because this is the period in which the most rapid brain development occurs. We know that gaps in opportunity are detectable by the time babies are 9 months and well-established by Kindergarten. In the weeks and months after birth early brain development is taking off, and critical bonds are formed between the parents and child.

Shockingly, one in four American women return to work within 2 weeks of giving birth. The need for paid family leave is even greater among people of color and low-wage workers, who are more likely to provide needed income for their families. When new parents can stay with their baby in this critical period, research finds increased breastfeeding, reduced risk of infant mortality, increased well-baby care and vaccinations, among other benefits.

When mothers have access to paid family leave, they are more likely to go back to work with the same employer. This increases family income, reduces family stress, and increases mother's emotional well-being and mental health, reducing maternal depression. The health and well-being of parents plays an important role in the quality of care they are able to provide to their infant.

Children's Institute is proud to be a part of a strong and growing coalition of organizations, businesses, and individuals supporting the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Act. We urge you to support House Bill 3087.