Testimony in Support of A5166
Assembly Labor Committee
November 30, 2023

TO: The Honorable Joseph Egan, Chair; Anthony Verrelli, Vice-Chair; and Members of the Assembly Labor Committee

Good Morning, my name is Jani Vinick. I am testifying on behalf of the League of Women Voters of New Jersey (LWVNJ), Women and Family Issues Committee, for which I am a volunteer lobbyist. LWVNJ is a statewide organization that works on vital issues of concern to its members and the public. The League believes that democracy empowers and supports full engagement from women and all people with diverse backgrounds, race, socioeconomic status, age, work style, marital status, gender identity and belief systems. The League is also committed to standing with New Jersey's most vulnerable and oppressed residents as they seek equity and justice. We strongly support the bill before the committee today that expands the protections afforded by New Jersey's Family Leave Act (NJFLA). This bill will enable more New Jersey workers – and in particular women, low income and workers of color – to take leave to care for children, elderly, disabled and ill family members, without fearing job loss.

Despite the great strides that women have made toward achieving parity in the workforce, it remains true that working women are more likely to be caregivers than their working male counterparts. This trend was noted in a Forbes article in 2019 that stated as follows: "[W]hile women are more educated and more employed than ever, they are still taking on most of the household and familial duties. And it's not just about chores and childcare; women are also much more likely to be the ones who care for sick or elderly family members."
https://docs.google.com/document/d/140pQ9tqm9nXHcDZTDhe6XGL8IyOOqjqGeLHflWsiUbc/edit

Similarly, The Family Caregiver Alliance has reported that "Upwards of 75% of all caregivers in the U.S. are female, and may spend as much as 50% more time providing care than males."
https://www.caregiver.org/resource/caregiver-statistics-demographics/

Thus, expanding access to paid and unpaid family leave with job protection will enable more women to remain in the workforce while continuing to provide the vital care on which their loved ones depend. This is obviously critically important for the physical, emotional and

economic well-being of New Jersey families, and also promotes the gender equity and justice that the League of Women Voters, and New Jersey legislature values.

Not only is this bill critical to helping increase economic parity for women, but it is also a step toward creating greater justice and equity for New Jersey's lower income and workers of color who are least able to risk their jobs in order to care for relatives. According to the Rutgers University Center for Women and Work's Fact Sheet on NJFLA Coverage Gaps (https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Centers/CWW/NJFLA%20Coverage%20Gaps%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf), 56.8 percent of NJ workers who earn less than $25,000 are not eligible for the NJFLA's job protections, either due to the number of employees employed by their employers, or the amount of hours they have worked. Thus these lower-income New Jerseyans are least likely to take the paid family leave that they desperately need in order to care for their children and sick relatives, because they cannot afford to risk job loss. These same New Jerseyans are also the least likely to be able to afford to pay someone else to care for their loved ones.

In contrast, only 7.6 percent of NJ workers earning $100,000 - $150,000 are ineligible for the NJFLA's job protections. Thus New Jerseyans who are better able to afford paid care for their loved ones, and who are better able to risk job loss, are the very New Jerseyans who are enjoying greater access to the protections afforded by the NJ Family Leave Act. This is just the type of economic inequity that the League works to eliminate, and for this reason, we strongly support this Bill and urge you to do so as well.

In addition, we urge the Committee to consider amendments to the bill to give it even greater reach. In particular we ask the Committee to reduce the number of hours that an employee is required to work in the 12 months preceding their leave, in order to qualify for the protections of the NJFLA. Currently, an employee must have worked for their employer a minimum of 1000 hours. According to the previously cited study by Rutgers Center for Women and Children, although men and women workers in New Jersey have similar rates of ineligibility for NJFLA benefits, women are more likely to not be covered due to the number of hours that they have worked, while men are more likely to be ineligible because their employers employ fewer than 30 employees. Thus, this bill, as currently written, will do more to expand coverage for ineligible men than for currently ineligible women.

Finally, there is reason to believe that expanded NJFLA coverage will promote not only increased economic well-being for women, but also improved physical and emotional health. The Rutgers Center For Women and Work conducted a study concerning the implementation of Family Leave Insurance in New Jersey. (https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/Documents/Implementation_PaidFamilyLeave_Oct2021.pdf) The study concluded that "Family Leave Insurance in New Jersey is associated with

improved mental and physical health outcomes among women, especially those in lower income categories." Notably, the study determined that an expanded ability to take paid leave to care for a child or other ill family member resulted in increased attachment of women to the workplace and a decrease in post-partum depression.

While the study was focused on the paid family leave provided by the NJFLI, rather than on the job protections provided by the NJFLA, the findings clearly suggest that further expansion of family leave without fear of job loss will likewise increase the attachment of more New Jersey women to the workforce and have a positive impact on women's mental and physical health. Given New Jersey's significant focus on improving overall maternal health, this is a further compelling reason to pass this bill into law.

For all of the above reasons, on behalf of the League of Women Voters of NJ, I ask that you please support this important legislation and pass it out of committee. Further, as a member of the Time to Care Coalition, the League also wishes to urge this Committee to advance A5703/S405, which is another pending bill that strives to make access to paid leave more equitable.

Thank you for your time.

Testimony presented by:

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