



Testimony of Neil Richardson, Coordinator

DC Coalition on Long Term Care

Council of the District of Columbia

Committee of the Whole

Public Hearing on B26-0326 – *District Employee Paid Parental, Family, and Medical Leave
Amendment Act of 2025*

December 4, 2025

Chairman Mendelson and members of the Council, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important issue. I am representing the **DC Long Term Care Coalition**, a citywide network of providers, consumers, advocates, caregivers, and community partners working to ensure that every DC resident—older adults, people with disabilities, and those with chronic or complex conditions—can live with dignity and have access to high-quality long-term care. I also bring the perspective of being a former agency director and Deputy Chief of Staff in the Williams and Fenty administrations and deeply understand the pressures DC government employees experience.

We are here today because B26-0326 proposes major rollbacks to paid family and medical leave benefits for DC Government employees. These changes, if adopted, will deepen caregiver hardship, destabilize our already strained long-term care system, and run counter to the District's stated commitments to aging-in-community, health equity, disability rights, and workforce retention.

We want to be very clear: **the Coalition strongly opposes the proposed reductions in this bill**, including:

- Cutting paid family leave from 8 weeks to 2 weeks;
- Narrowing eligibility for employees who may need leave to care for a loved one;
- Reintroducing service-continuation or work agreements that penalize employees who must step back from work to support a family member; and
- Holding probationary employees financially liable if they leave within 12 weeks of taking leave.

What's at stake for DC residents—and for our long-term care system

Family caregivers are the backbone of long-term care in DC. Every day, they provide the support that enables thousands of residents to remain safely at home and out of institutions—often at great personal and financial cost.

The numbers tell a clear story:

- **One in five adults in DC—109,000 residents—is a family caregiver**, including many DC Government employees.
- They provide an estimated **69 million hours of unpaid care each year**, valued at **\$1.37 billion**.
- On average, caregivers spend **\$7,200 of their own money annually** to support a loved one.

These caregivers are not abstractions. They are the city workers who keep DC agencies running: 911 dispatchers, public health staff, school employees, transportation teams, disability service providers, first responders, social workers, and frontline workers across the government. Weakening their protections is not simply a workplace policy choice—it is a direct hit to the people who stabilize our long-term care system every day.

Who are DC’s caregivers?

- **60% are women**, with an average age of 50.
- **57% are working while caregiving**.
- **31% provide 40+ hours of care every week**—effectively a second full-time job.
- **52% experience financial strain**;
- **41% report moderate to high emotional stress**.

These numbers reflect a reality we hear constantly across the Coalition: caregivers are exhausted, stretched thin, and too often forced to choose between their job and the care needs of a parent, spouse, partner, or adult child with disabilities.

The District cannot afford to weaken caregiver support

DC already faces a **critical direct-care workforce shortage**—with roughly **11,500 workers available for the needs of more than 36,000 residents** who require assistance with activities of daily living. Family caregivers fill these gaps every single day. Reducing their access to paid leave would create cascading consequences:

- More caregivers leaving the workforce or cutting hours;
- Increased demand for direct-care services the system cannot supply;
- Higher public costs in Medicaid long-term care programs;
- Greater reliance on crisis-driven institutional placements;
- Higher stress and burnout among government workers.

Simply put, reducing paid family leave is **not only unjust—it is fiscally shortsighted and systemically harmful**.

Our request

The DC Long Term Care Coalition urges the Council to:

1. **Reject the proposed reductions in B26-0326** and preserve the current 8-week paid leave benefit.
2. **Protect employees from punitive service-continuation agreements** that create fear and inequity.
3. **Ensure that eligibility definitions remain broad enough** to reflect the real caregiving responsibilities DC families shoulder.
4. **Approach any future changes through a long-term care lens**, recognizing the integral role of family caregivers in DC's health and human services infrastructure.

DC has long been a national leader in its commitments to aging-in-place and disability inclusion. We ask the Council to uphold those values now. Protecting caregivers protects the entire long-term care system—and the thousands of residents it supports.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I welcome any questions.

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