



National Association of Social Workers - New Jersey Chapter
Testimony of Jennifer Thompson, Executive Director
Regarding S-2528
May 10, 2018

Good morning Mr. Chairperson and distinguished Committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on bill S-2528. My name is Jennifer Thompson and I am the Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers - New Jersey Chapter (NASW-NJ). The National Association of Social Workers was founded in 1955 and is the largest organization of professional social workers in the world. Our New Jersey chapter is one of the largest in the nation. Today, I sit before you, representing the more than 20,000 professional social workers across our state and the hundreds of thousands of clients we serve each day. Social workers across the state provide direct services in shelters, clinics, hospitals, nonprofit organizations, in private practice, and in many other venues—most frequently serving the most vulnerable populations in our state. We provide essential therapy and counseling to children, families, and within communities in need, and conduct research on pressing social issues, such as today's topic of Family Leave Insurance and Temporary Disability Insurance.

I am here today to offer testimony in **SUPPORT** of the passage and adoption of the policy improvements to New Jersey's Family Leave Insurance (NJ FLI) and Temporary Disability Insurance (NJ TDI) programs, as captured in the proposed version of S-2528. I would like to thank the Bill sponsors for crafting legislation that addresses the needs of families and individuals who will avail themselves of these programs and for incorporating many of the suggestions and improvements our Coalition offered for this bill. The amendments put forth to address the wage replacement and benefit cap, increase awareness of the FLI and TDI programs, extend job protections, and expand the definition of family—among other amendments—are crucial to the successful expansion of the FLI and TDI programs and the ability to reach all residents of New Jersey who may need these services.

I would like to address a couple of items that do not appear in this version of the bill that would further strengthen the FLI and TDI programs and ensure those who are in need are able to take advantage of these programs. Most notably, I would like to address the opt-in for self-employed persons. At NASW-NJ, we represent the interests of the many licensed clinical social workers in our state who choose to enter into full- or part-time private practice. Whether working with managed care organizations or as out-of-network, fee-for-service providers, these practitioners are dependent upon a steady flow of income based on the ability to meet with their clients, as scheduled, on a regular basis. Having to cancel a large swath of client appointments in order to address important personal family care issues effectively reduces the clinician's income to zero for the period of time they are unable to see clients. In addition, many, if not all, of these practitioners incur rental, utility, and other expenses associated with maintaining a place of business, whether or not the practitioner is able to see clients. As such, the opportunity to opt in to NJ FLI and TDI would greatly improve these practitioners' ability to care for their family members, while at the same time protecting their livelihood.

Lastly, I would like to mention the exemption threshold for job protection under this bill, currently set at 30 employees, which, from the perspective of non-profit and human service organizations, may be a higher threshold than desirable for job protection. These types of employers—including, but not limited to, smaller private social service organizations, shelters, advocacy organizations, community support providers, and early education providers—often function with fewer employees than for-profit businesses. Employees of these organizations serve the most vulnerable people in our state, and, due to lower salaries in the not-for-profit and human services sectors, are often just one missed paycheck or misfortune away from finding themselves in the same dire predicament as those to whom they provide services. Making job protection available to employees in organizations with fewer than 30 employees will allow more of these workers to address their personal family needs and quickly return to providing valuable services to individuals and families and strengthening our communities. If you are interested in exploring this issue further we'd be happy to offer our assistance in this endeavor.

Thank you for your time and commitment to ensuring our state's Family Leave Insurance and Temporary Disability Insurance programs meet the needs of all families who may need to avail themselves of these services and allowing us the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this critical piece of legislation.

I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have.