



**TESTIMONY OF GLBTQ LEGAL ADVOCATES & DEFENDERS  
IN SUPPORT OF S290 – The Healthy and Safe Families and Workplaces Act**

Submitted by:  
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GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders works in New England and nationally to create a just society free of discrimination based on gender identity and expression, HIV status, and sexual orientation through strategic litigation, public policy advocacy, and education. I am a senior staff attorney at GLAD, focusing on family and youth issues. I write in support of S290, and I write in particular to support the bill’s definition of “family member.”

S290 is an important bill because it ensures that workers in Rhode Island can take paid sick and safe days. GLAD believes that Rhode Island should join Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont and provide this economic security to workers and their families. This type of paid leave is particularly important for the LGBTQ community. Research shows that LGBTQ people are more likely to live in poverty than their non-LGBTQ counterparts. M.V. Lee Badgett & Alyssa Schneebaum, The Impact of Wage Equality on Sexual Orientation Poverty Gaps, Williams Institute, 1 (June 2015), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Impact-of-Wage-Equality-on-Sexual-Orientation-Poverty-Gaps-June-2015.pdf>. LGBTQ people of color and transgender people are especially vulnerable to poverty. Id.; James, S.E., Herman, J.L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M., Executive Summary of the

Report of the 2015 Transgender Survey, 3 (2016), <http://www.ustranssurvey.org/report>. For these individuals and families, taking time off of work without pay can mean risking their paychecks, their jobs and undermine their economic stability. This bill would promote the economic security and stability of all workers in Rhode Island, including LGBTQ individuals and families.

GLAD, further, strongly supports the bill's inclusive definition of "family member," which is vital to the LGBTQ community. The LGBTQ community and its families have historically lacked legal recognition or formalization under the law. Despite this, LGBTQ family relationships are critical to stability and well-being. In the United States today, family composition is increasingly diverse. "Public discussion about American families often assumes the nation is largely made up of married heterosexual couples raising their biological children. Yet less than a quarter of all U.S. households fall into this category. Today's children may be raised by grandparents, single parents, stepparents, aunts, uncles or foster parents." Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council and Center for American Progress, All Children Matter: How Legal and Social Inequalities Hurt LGBT Families, Executive Summary, 1 (2011), available at <http://www.lgbtmap.org/file/all-children-matter-summary.pdf>. Broadening definitions of family allows LGBTQ families "to accurately reflect their household" and to benefit equally from protections such as paid sick and safe leave. *Id.* at 4. Rhode Island is no stranger to recognizing and protecting functional family relationships. See, e.g., R.I. G. L. § 15-8-26; Rubano v. DiCenzo, 759 A.2d 959 (R.I. 2000). Rhode Island must continue to keep pace with the reality of today's families.

In conclusion, GLAD believes that S290 provides important protections for Rhode Island workers and families, and we strongly support the bill's current robust and inclusive definition of family member.