Currently, under the protections of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993, eligible employees in the United States are guaranteed the right to take 12 workweeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period for one of the following reasons: the birth of a child; the placement of child for adoption or foster care; in order to care for the spouse, or child, or parent, of the employee, if such spouse, child or parent has a serious health condition; or because of a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the functions of the employee’s position. Existing legislation does not guarantee workers in Massachusetts the right to paid family medical leave (PFML), and while many workers have access to unpaid leave, most cannot afford to use it. This bill advocates for guaranteed paid leave for eligible employees.

The Bill

H.4351: An Act establishing a family and medical leave and temporary disability leave insurance program

Elevator Speech

Hello, thank you for taking the time to meet with me today to discuss an issue that is important to me and my fellow citizens. My name is [_______], and as an [Economics and Politics/Economics and Business/HSSP] major at Brandeis University – and future Massachusetts employee – I have a personal stake in the financial security of our communities and future stewardship of the Commonwealth. Currently, over 40 percent of Massachusetts workers are exposed to serious financial risks when faced with family planning and medical emergencies, as they are not protected by existing federal and state legislation. These workers are forced to fall back on a combination of unpaid sick days, vacation time, personal time off, and – most worrisome – credit card debt. This approach is fundamentally flawed. Senate Bill 108 proposes a solution by pooling together the resources of Massachusetts’ vibrant economy to provide meaningful baseline levels of financial worker protection for family medical leave and temporary disability insurance. The Bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Family and Medical Leave.
on Labor and Workforce Development, and we ask that you urge your colleagues to report favorably. This responsible and forward-looking approach will allow Massachusetts to strengthen its economy and join the ranks of nearly every industrialized nation in the world to once again become a leader in providing a safe, sustainable, and prosperous future for all its citizens.

**Letter to the Legislator**

Dear [Senator/Representative],

As a registered [Waltham/Newton/Massachusetts] voter, I have a vested interest in the financial security of our communities and future stewardship of the state’s economy. Today I am a senior finishing my B.A. in economics and politics at Brandeis University. I am young, healthy, and relatively fit; thankfully, I can say the same for my parents. However, I will soon be entering the Massachusetts workforce, and I would like to responsibly plan for the day when my loved ones and myself might not be as medically fortunate. It is important that we take this forward-looking approach to ensure the protection of all Massachusetts families.

Current federal and state legislation does not guarantee workers in Massachusetts the right to paid family medical leave. When emergencies occur, 1.2 million Massachusetts families – nearly 40 percent of households – face financial burdens and risk losing their jobs if they take time off from work to care for a family medical emergency, or after the birth of a child. These households are forced to fall back on a combination of unpaid sick days, vacation time, personal time off, and – most worrisome – credit card debt. This approach, which likely forces the choice between taking care of a child they love or the job that puts food on the table is both fundamentally flawed and unsustainable.

Senate bill S. 1008 will provide eligible employees up to 12 weeks of job-protected family medical leave or 26 weeks of temporary disability insurance benefits. Weekly benefits – which are not to exceed $1,000 – are calculated as a portion of an individual’s average weekly income and are allocated using a progressive scale; for example, higher levels of income will receive a lower percentage of average weekly earnings. This legislation will allow employees to take care of themselves and their loved ones, and will protect the economic security of millions of Massachusetts families.

Businesses, despite those who may oppose this legislation, actually stand to benefit from the myriad positive externalities of paid family medical leave and temporary disability insurance. Paid leave policies have been shown to significantly improve worker retention and reduce turnover costs, improve worker morale, and increase productivity. Innovative and industry-leading companies including Google, Microsoft, and Spotify have already recognized the strategic investment in paid family medical leave. It is for these reasons – and numerous more – that many businesses in states with family medical leave and temporary disability insurance laws have reported neutral to favorable financial results.

Senate Bill S. 1008 is currently in the Joint Labor and Workforce Development Committee, and has recently received renewed attention regarding possible funding models. In light of the numerous benefits to Massachusetts employees, families, and businesses, we urge you to (report favorably on this bill/ inform your colleagues on the Labor and Workforce Committee of the importance of a favorable report on this bill.)

**House Ways and Means Script**

As a co-author of numerous economic development acts ranging from environmental innovations to emerging technologies it is clear that you understand the necessity for us to lead on investments that ensure the strength of our state’s economy. Furthermore, wearing the dual professional hats of legislator and insurance broker, I am sure that you see the prudence in responsible future planning, and understand the necessity to pool common resources to provide for that good. For me, as an economics and politics major at Brandeis University – and future Massachusetts employee – I have a personal stake in the financial security of our communities and future stewardship of the Commonwealth, and I would like to participate in that future planning.

As you may be aware, currently, over 40 percent of Massachusetts workers are exposed to serious financial risks when faced with family planning and medical emergencies, as they are not protected by existing federal and state legislation. These workers are forced to fall back on a combination of unpaid sick days, vacation time, personal time off, and – most worrisome – credit card debt. This approach is fundamentally flawed and unsustainable.

Senate Bill 1008, An Act establishing a family and medical leave and temporary disability leave insurance program, would provide a weekly benefit – which is not to exceed $1,000 – for up to 12 calendar weeks for family medical leave and up to 26 weeks for temporary disability. The program employs a progressive scale to determine the percentage of an individual’s weekly wage to be paid as benefit relative to the individual’s weekly income; as the income of the individual rises, the percentage of the weekly income falls.

This legislation would provide myriad positive economic benefits. First and foremost, $1008 would protect the
economic security of millions of Massachusetts families. More so, paid leave policies have been shown to significantly improve worker retention and reduce turnover costs, improve worker morale, and increase productivity. Furthermore, this legislation would allow smaller businesses to compete on an even playing field with larger businesses. It is for these reasons – and numerous more – that many businesses in states with family medical leave and temporary disability insurance laws have reported neutral to favorable financial results.

Businesses who oppose the legislation may only see the up-front accounting costs while failing to realize the longer term investment opportunity of paid temporary disability and family medical care leave. Similarly, elected officials might fail to view the program’s long term benefits to the state’s economy. This legislation will erase the existing competitive disadvantage and allow Massachusetts businesses to compete on an even playing field and grow. In the October 27th Joint Committee hearing, your colleague Rep. Kenneth Gordon (D-Bedford) argued that paid family medical leave would actually “help Massachusetts companies compete with those in California, New Jersey and Rhode Island, which have already approved similar legislation...as a matter of law.” As companies in other states that have led on family medical leave and temporary disability insurance continue to attract top talent – many coming from our state’s fine universities – we must act in a big way to protect our economic future.

It is for these reasons that I urge you and your colleagues to vote favorably on S1008. This legislation addresses a real problem that poses a threat to our businesses, our state’s future economic prosperity, and – most importantly – our communities.

**Excerpts from Campaign Journals**

**David**

The connections made in this legislative meeting (with the coalition) were critical for us, as they provided inside information which was not accessible elsewhere. This was an additional lesson I learned: to really get involved and understand what is going on with the Bill, you have to attend legislative meetings and talk with those who are spearheading the lobbying efforts, as material published online does not typically provide comprehensive and updated information. I believe the meeting went extremely well and I certainly had a much better understanding of the current status of the Bill after attending.

One thing I immediately realized (in the meeting with Senator Wolf’s staff) was the importance of establishing and maintaining connections. By fostering a healthy relationship with Wolf’s staff we were able to direct technical and detailed questions which they helped us comprehensively answer. Additionally, we were advised as how to best concentrate our lobbying efforts. The staff provided us with names, especially in the House of Representatives, whose support was not yet secured. Furthermore, we were provided hundreds of documents including fact sheets, testimonies, letters of opposition, and other resources which were used to strengthen our lobbying campaign for the Bill.

**Milo**

Another takeaway I had from this meeting (RiseUp Legislative Meeting) was the importance of team diversity. The organizations in attendance ranged from labor to religious groups; furthermore, the representatives from each organization brought a unique skill set that added value to the overall group. Some representatives were highly technical, and embarked on fascinating dissections of the possible amendments to funding mechanisms, eligibility requirements, and military provisions. Others had a highly nuanced understanding of the media aspect, and focused their efforts towards coordinating the most impactful responses in a variety of scenarios. Finally, the representative from RaiseUP brought incredible leadership qualities, and effectively ran a detail-oriented meeting while maintaining an incredible “30,000 ft view” throughout. I cannot overstate how impressed I was by the collection of skills, and how much each skillset complemented the others.

In the course of lobbying for S. 1008 at the State House our team developed a close working relationship with Senator Daniel A. Wolf (D-Harwich) and his legislative team (in particular Director and General Counsel, Anjali Sakaria, and Legislative Advisor, Katie Barry). One of the most important lessons I learned is how vital these relationships are. From our very first visit, we were welcomed into the office and invited to a detailed discussion on the substance and politics surrounding the Bill. From that point onwards we were able to direct our most technical and political questions to Sen. Wolf’s office, and were always presented with the most detailed and current information. There are some things you just can’t look up online!

**Ean**

After the interview we had a much more casual conversation with the Senator Wolf that I found very powerful. He asked us who we were voting for in the upcoming election, and as Brandeis students what our opinion was on the current state of politics in the United States. To my surprise he was extremely candid and even apologized that his generation has made it very difficult for our generation using the examples of student debt, mortgages, and housing inflation. He also mentioned that he would not be running for
reelection as he believed in getting new blood into politics as he has served his terms to the best of his abilities. I could not be more grateful for our experiences in the State House with Senator Wolf and his staff and the work that they did for S.1008.

■ Update
As of this publication, the bill has been reprinted as bill S.2447, and is in the House Committee on Ways and Means.