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I am writing this statement in support of Bill 36-0207, which provides for 2 hours of monthly paid time off for parents of children with disabilities to attend medical appointments with their children. The challenge of caring for a child with a disability is significant – many studies have shown that parents of children with disability experience physical, emotional, and social challenges related to the care of their children. Entire families experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, physical abuse or self-harm, headaches, insomnia, hypertension, and intestinal/stomach ulcers to name a few of the adverse health manifestations of the stress of caring for disabled children. Parents often have concern over societal marginalization and isolation, not only of the child, but of themselves. Family-based therapeutic interventions have been shown to be of the most benefit in addressing these issues, and I believe any measures that may be taken to alleviate this strain on families would be beneficial to these families and therefore to our community.

There are other measures in place that are supposed to provide help for families with disabled children, and while these are helpful, more still can be done to help these families. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975 to assure access to free public education for individuals with qualifying conditions, but it does not provide time or resources for medical treatment of these children. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 allows for 12 weeks of unpaid leave per 12 months period for care of family members with qualifying conditions, however there are limitations on who qualifies for this – the employer must have 50 or more employees and the individual employee must have worked for 105 hours/month for at least 12 months. These laws do not address the complexity of certain medical conditions, which may require more time with providers or in treatment. They also do not address the additional financial stress incurred by reduced income during leave or by employees that work at a company of less than 50 employees.

Bill 36-0207 can help to alleviate at least some of the stress families face in the effort to care for disabled children, as it will provide financial coverage for at least some of the regular health maintenance visits required for medical complexity. It also is more comprehensive as it includes

full-time employees of companies with at least 10 employees as opposed to 50. The task of taking care of children with disabilities is already daunting – caregivers spend more time not only in health care settings, but coordinating care, administering treatments, and transporting children to and from appointments. This bill is sure to provide at least some relief for people who are already stretched thin trying to do the best they can to provide for their children