**Paid family leave fund overflowing with your money**

There is perhaps no more recent or perfect example of government’s ability to extract billions in hard-earned tax dollars from working people without them really knowing over a relatively short period — just one year in this case — than the Paid and Family Medical Leave program.

Approved by the Democrat-Controlled legislature in 2019, it had a noble aim: provide working families a better chance to care for loved ones, or close family friends, in their time of need or illness, without jeopardizing their household budgets.

We can argue over the value of the PFML program, who gets to use it, for how long, or who should pay for it. But there can be little disagreement that as currently constituted, it is overfunded.

The wages lost away from work would be subsidized by everyone *else* in Connecticut who earns a paycheck; benefits would scale up based on income and be limited to up to $900 a week.

In its brief history, the program has paid out claims of $309 million for justified leaves of up to 12 weeks. During that time, the PFML program collected $433 million from working people whose weekly paychecks were automatically lightened by 0.5 percent leaving the state-sponsored account an extra $125 million for just the fiscal year of 2023 alone. The PFML board did not start collecting fees until January 2021 and did not start paying out until January 2022.

This somewhat obscure program, approved late on a Friday night in Hartford in the dying days of a long session with zero House Republican votes, has exploded with little public note into a $1 billion windfall controlled by 15 un-elected political appointees.

It took only 20 months for the PFML to collect more than $1 billion. If the recent actions of its board of directors are any indication, it will continue to grow by leaps and bounds regardless of need or cost to the taxpayer. A modest, reasonable proposal supported by the House Republicans Oct. 12 would have given taxpayers a $20 million break in the amount contributed to the fund by dropping the individual rate one-quarter point, to.475 percent, a level supported by an actuarial accounting that ensured PFML would remain intact.

But that proposal was not even brought up for a vote by the board on Oct. 12. The current contribution of 0.5 percent will come out of every paycheck for the foreseeable future.

There was significant debate over the PFML plan when it was first raised. Our concerns were that it was yet another mandatory tax on working people and families that would continue to grow if left unchecked. I heard some constituents voice opposition, wondering why they should pay yet another tax so that someone else does not have to go to work.

Interestingly, and perhaps of some encouragement, one-third of claims presented to the governing authority were rejected in the first year.

But even if the board of directors does not make adjustments to the funding of the PFML account in the future, someone else might. Connecticut has a long history of having the legislature come in and swipe savory, dedicated funding sources during times of economic exigence. Just ask state motorists who thought they were Saving the Sound when they paid extra for those special decorative license plates. Tough economic times require tough decisions so some of that dedicated funding went elsewhere. Save the Sound? Sorry, save that year’s budget.

Or the ardent anti-smoking lobbyists who, like the tulips that popped their heads up outside the Capitol every spring, mobilized when they saw millions in tobacco settlement dollars targeted into a general budget appropriation — talk to us next year! Same for the Gamblers Anonymous groups who witnessed casino revenues being redirected for other causes.

Luckily in more recent history, the public never bought into the faux “lock box’’ safeguard promises to spend all toll revenues solely on roads, ultimately dooming Gov. Ned Lamont’s signature first-term legislative initiative.

We can argue over the value of the PFML program, who gets to use it, for how long, or who should pay for it. But there can be little disagreement that as currently constituted, it is overfunded, say neutral professionals who view the numbers through green eye shades. And more importantly the taxpayers who foot the bill deserve a break, however modest.