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**SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY CLASS AT RAMAPO COLLEGE PRESENTS
TESTIMONY SUPPORTING FAMILY LEAVE ACT**

(Mahwah) – Students enrolled in a Social Welfare Policy class at Ramapo College of New Jersey traveled to Trenton in February to testify before the Senate Labor Committee in support of the state’s Family Leave Act. The legislation ultimately passed by a 3 – 1 margin.

Dr. V. Scott Massimo, an associate professor of social work who teaches the class, explained that the testimony was developed by the entire class. At first, students thought this Act applied to only older workers with families to support, but they came to realize its relevance to their personal histories as well as their futures. This led them to write in their testimony: “We want to be able to be productive workers in the economy as well as dedicated family members. We are investing in a college degree so that we can build a foundation for our future. But what if tragedy strikes? We need Family Leave Insurance in order to feel secure in our quest for success, whatever the future may hold.”

“After the hearing, to the students’ surprise,” noted Massimo, “they were invited to a press conference where the president of New Jersey Citizen Action specifically named Ramapo College and thanked the class for its support.” Citizen Action has asked the class to speak before the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee in the near future when the bill reaches that final stage before going to the governor for approval.

In addition, at the end of February, the students were invited to present at the Influencing National Policy Symposium held at Rutgers University’s Newark campus. They were one of three student groups chosen to address almost 200 people, including

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Sheila Oliver, Assemblywoman, 34th NJ Legislative District, and Walter Kalman, Executive Director of the NJ chapter of the National Association of Social Workers. After their presentation, the class organized postcard signings, where symposium participants filled out cards addressed to the governor and assembly members in support of the Family Medical Leave Insurance bill and to bring the cards back to their schools for signatures.

Contemporary Social Policy is a required senior-level course for students majoring in social work at Ramapo College. The course includes a combination of policy analysis and hands-on advocacy. The 2004 class won the national “Influencing State Policy” contest and this year’s class is applying again. Given their progress, they are very hopeful, said Massimo.

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