



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony of Whitney Parrish
Maine Women's Lobby
In support of LD 1410
An Act To Create Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits
April 19, 2019

Senator Bellows, Representative Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: my name is Whitney Parrish, Director of Policy and Program for the Maine Women's Lobby. The Maine Women's Lobby is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide membership organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine's 678,000 women and girls.

I am pleased to speak to you today in strong support of LD 1410, *An Act To Create Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits*.

Each of us is likely to face at least one major life event that requires us to take an extended time away from work to heal or to care for a family member. As we consider our own lives, and those of our family, friends, and greater circle, we realize we all know someone facing a major illness or a serious injury, someone caring for an aging parent or disabled family member, or welcoming a new baby. For the clear majority of Maine workers, these facts of life become an incredible hardship, forcing families to choose between caring for themselves or a loved one and affording their basic needs.

Both Maine and federal law require that an employee of a business of a certain size with one of the above qualifying events be given 12 weeks off, unpaid, to care for themselves or a family member without losing their job. While both were landmarks in their time, few of us can afford to go without a paycheck for an extended period, and illness and tragedy don't wait to strike us when we're prepared. A 2016 analysis found that Americans lose \$20.6 billion every year in wages as a result of needing to take family and medical leave.

LD 1410 would create a system of social insurance funded by small contributions from employees' paychecks (0.55%) from which we could draw a partial replacement of our wages for up to 12 weeks for family leave and 20 weeks for personal medical leave or to care for a loved one who is a veteran. Six other states and Washington DC have already implemented or established similar programs.

A system of paid family leave insurance would benefit our state in multiple ways. Paid leave helps businesses retain employees, makes it more likely that women who give birth will remain in the

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workforce one year later, and helps family caregivers stay in the workforce. It is an important strategy in addressing Maine's workforce challenges and would be one more way to remain competitive with our neighbors, attracting the younger workers that Maine so desperately needs.

Access to paid family and medical leave would help close the gender wage gap by helping women stay in the workforce throughout their careers, equalizing caregiving in two-parent households, and helping women provide for their families and save for retirement.

Paid family leave is a solution to the serious challenge of finding and affording care for an infant. Maine market rates for infant care range from \$145 to \$244/week, making it unaffordable for most families assuming you can find a provider who will accept infants. Under LD 1410, a baby in a two-parent family could be cared for at home for the first six months, saving parents money while reducing exposure to communicable disease.

Paid leave is one important strategy to address Maine's aging population. The demand for family caregivers will increase as Baby Boomers age. The majority of family caregivers are middle aged women, and the demands of working and providing care simultaneously frequently drive them to leave the workforce, costing them financially both in the short and long term.

Paid leave has the potential to shorten hospital stays, reducing health care costs, and has been shown to reduce the use of public benefits like SNAP and TANF. It puts money in people's pockets just when they need it most, and, because they use it to meet their expenses, it circulates. LD 1410 would benefit Maine's entire economy.

With the potential to improve our health, our financial well-being, our workforce, and our economy, paid family and medical leave is truly an issue whose time has come. We urge you to take concrete steps this year to make paid family leave a reality for Mainers by passing LD 1410. Thank you for your time.

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