

Dec 5, 2021

Dear Members of the Commission on Paid Family and Medical Leave:

I am grateful for your service!

I know that your purpose is to establish the best possible policy for Maine's long term future and I look forward to the substantive legislation I know we will pass. The challenge of passing Build Back Better underscores the importance of a State system that can be exceeded by a Federal benefit but guarantees some coverage regardless of what happens at the Federal level.

However, in the meantime, we have an urgent need for emergency PFML now! It is impossible

for workers to comply with public health guidelines for quarantining and self-isolating without paid time off. Parents cannot afford to keep their children home from school, even if their children are symptomatic or have been close contacts with an infected

person. Workers of all ages are forced into work while sick. One workplace in Maine is giving \$1,000 bonuses if shifts are never missed — this is the opposite of the incentives and polices we need.



**Heather Shattuck-Heidorn** @HeatherSH22 · Nov 30

My husband's workplace instituted a \$1000 bonus per month if you don't miss any shifts. ...

We are having a COVID spike. Today, a coworker came in and said their fever was 104 last night.

But it's Nov. 30th, last day of the month. Gonna lose that grand if ya don't come in baby...



The fact of the matter is that when we speak of the Great Resignation, we are really referring to a great resignation of *women*. During the pandemic, women have exited the labor force at **twice the rate** that men have; their participation in the paid labor force is now the lowest it has been **in more than 30 years**. About **one-third of all mothers** in the workforce have scaled back or left their jobs since March 2020. That labor shortage? It's being felt most acutely in sectors like hospitality, retail and healthcare - industries where women make up a majority of workers.

We know that many of the women who have left the wage labor force are "choosing" only from a set of dangerous choices. Leaving wage labor in middle-adulthood increases a woman's risk of future poverty, potentially lowers social security benefits, and threatens future

opportunities for promotion. These are steep prices to pay for needing time to care for sick or

vulnerable loved ones. (see

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/19/great-resignation-mothers-forced-to-leave-jobs>)

We also know many who have left the workforce are navigating “Long Covid” which may be ultimately classified as long-term disability. Again, many workers do not have the money to cover their expenses while seeking healing, and the medical system is clearly not able to quickly provide care for those with the worst long-covid symptoms. We will hear testimony on this medical problem for years to come, but in the meantime know that individuals and families are increasingly financially insecure because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Paid Family and Medical Leave - or some form of UBI in the meantime - is essential for the wellbeing of our communities.

Finally, I hope your commission will intersect with the Permanent Commission on Racial,

Indigenous and Tribal Populations in Maine. The responses we’ve thus far made to Covid-19 have exacerbated income, health, and educational inequalities. Paid Family and Medical Leave is just one of many policy interventions we need to quickly address these increasing disparities.

Again, I recognize that an emergency plan is potentially outside of the scope of your work. However, we are all working at a time where we’re responding to new information we didn’t expect. Our shared public health depends on people being able to take time off from work to care for themselves or a loved one – to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and to potentially ward off worsening illness by resting and receiving home care. Please

consider beginning your work with this time sensitive matter! (see

<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2786466>)

Sincerely,

Kimberly Simmons , PhD

Portland, Maine

