

Good afternoon,

My name is Gabrielle Wiley, and I'm a 29 year old living and working in Bangor, Maine where I'm also the primary caretaker for an aging parent. I'm submitting this testimony in hopes that it will contribute to creating Maine's first paid FMLA act, and perhaps advocate for stronger protections to be placed for Maine workers.

Statistics collected on the income of Maine residents paints a bleak picture. In Penobscot County the median annual income in 2021 was just over \$55,000, and nearly 14% of Penobscot County residents live at or below the Poverty level. (Maine.gov) While I would love to say these don't feel accurate to my own personal experience, I know that they are because of how many people I see daily struggling to make ends meet, including the economic challenges my mom and I face.

As the caretaker of an aging parent, much like having a small child, I need to be present for medical events (emergent or planned) which may require significant time from work. I am lucky to work for an organization that already offers paid FMLA, but between my current income and financial obligations there's no way that I could afford to use it. According to MIT's Living Wage Calculator, a living hourly wage in Bangor, Maine for a two-person household with no children on a single income is calculated as \$24.69. My employer offers 60% of my hourly pay (which is less than that living wage figure) for qualifying short term disability FMLA, and that resulting figure is less than the state's minimum wage of \$13.80 per hour. Which thanks to rising housing, food, and utility costs, is grossly inadequate.

I know I'm not alone in my situation, because I've met many other hardworking people who are singlehandedly supporting aging family members and, like myself, are afraid of how they will manage to afford necessities like housing and food and utilities if they had to take an extended leave from work in order to care for their families. As Maine's population continues to grow older, we need to focus on how we can best support not just the elderly but also those who are staying to care for them. Working families need our support to continue to make Maine their home, and we need working families for their contributions to our local businesses and industries. A 60% FMLA rate such as what is offered by my employer is a start, however it is not substantive enough for most of Maine's working families and would leave many of us financially behind, placing a further strain on our social safety net programs. We need a 90% imbursement

rate to support our working families so that they can continue to live and work in our beautiful state.

Thank you for listening.

Sources:

<https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/county-economic-profiles/countyProfiles.html>

<https://livingwage.mit.edu/metros/12620>