

February 10, 2023

Testimony in support of Paid Family Medical Leave. LD258

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. My name is Star Pelsue and I am a resident of Portland, Maine. I am writing in neither support or opposition of LD 258. I would like to take this opportunity to ask that you please consider allocating the startup funding for Paid Family Medical Leave in LD 258 An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

Paid Family Medical Leave is crucial in supporting Maine families as they care for their loved ones. The program is one that could alleviate one additional stress during what for most is a highly stressful time. Eleven years ago, my youngest brother and his family stationed in Guam sent the wonderful news that his latest child had been born. Our families were excited at the news of another girl. Six weeks later we received the devastating news that my niece had a massive stroke. The military was sending the family to the hospital in Pearl Harbor. After several days we received word that the doctors there believed my niece had contracted meningitis which resulted in the stroke, damaging 85% of the brain. It was determined that she was born with Severe Combined Immune Deficiency (SCID). The Air Force transferred my brother and his family stateside to the Charleston, South Carolina area because of their immunity ward. It didn't take long for them to find that my niece Fiona was the worst case that they had seen, and they recommended that she see the specialist who created the protocol for treating SCID. This Dr. and her team were located at the Duke medical center in North Carolina. In the meantime, my brother's oldest child who was 2 at the time was being bounced around from family member to family member. Each took vacation time to be home with the toddler until it was the turn of the next relative who had time to donate to her care. I am fortunate that the school I was teaching at let me take leave so I could move into my brother's home to be the caregiver while he, his wife, and Fiona went to North Carolina for a year!

My family always comes first. I didn't flinch when I offered my support during this difficult time. A child we were told would never walk or talk and likely not be expected to make it to her first birthday. If it meant eating ramen noodles or working 2 jobs when I returned to straighten out the loss of my paycheck I would gladly do it again. I worry about families who can't afford to pay for the caregiving of a child or parent and need to leave work to do so. I hope you will find start-up funding for this much-needed program. It was the most stressful year for both sides of our family. As a volunteer at Ronald McDonald House in Portland, I worry about the families who need our services. Those that have short or long stays would have one less thing to worry about.

I urge you to support the start-up funds for this all-important program that will help all Maine residents at some point in their life. One never knows which curve ball may come one's way, but this will help lessen the burden when that occurs.

Thank you,

Star Pelsue