

**Testimony In Support of LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the
Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program**

Meghan Gardner

Orono, Maine

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Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Meghan Gardner and I live in Orono, Maine. I am testifying in support of paid family and medical leave for Maine.

My story begins here: I was 8 months pregnant and broke.

We sat in his unairconditioned office discussing my teaching schedule for the upcoming fall semester. I kept my blazer on, worried that the patches of underarm sweat would make me seem less professional. We politely ignored my massive, rounded belly as we discussed the number of classes he could offer me. As an untenured instructor at a private college, I was one of the 77% of working Mainers who did not have access to paid family medical leave; I walked out of his office relieved, but desperately hoping that I would give birth early to have more time to recover.

Six weeks after giving birth, I was standing in a classroom in front of 30 first-year students, bleeding into my pants and leaking milk into my heavily-padded brassiere. My husband and I cobbled together childcare as best we could, though this often meant passing our firstborn back and forth instead of parenting together. Like many birthing parents, I suffered from postpartum depression made worse by the helplessness I felt. I was overwhelmed, unable to be my best self at work or at home.

As far as employers go, I considered myself lucky: They gave me classes to teach, assigned me only one night class, and kindly set aside a room on the first floor of my students' dormitory for me to pump breast milk in private.

For all of this, and my meager paycheck, I was extremely grateful. And the depth of my gratitude is an example of an undeniable truth: the bar for employers of working parents is so low it's subterranean.

Like many parents, financial survival drove our family's decision-making process. As much as I loved my job and students, I would not have chosen to leave my 6-week-old infant. I would not have chosen to put my body through the strain of working so soon after a difficult delivery, postpartum hemorrhaging, and minor surgeries. I would not have chosen to prioritize my job over the health and well-being of my family. But parents who do not have access to paid family medical leave often do not have a choice.

We are not a culture that is organized to support families, full stop. We cannot simply hope that employers will go above and beyond the current minimum standards; it is up to lawmakers like you to raise the bar for all of us.

I hope you will support LD 1964.

Sincerely,

Meghan Gardner