

Committee on Health and Human Services
Cross Building, Room 209
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333
c/o Karen Thomas, Committee Clerk

May 23, 2023

Re: LD 1964 – *An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program*

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and esteemed members of the Committee on Labor and Housing,

As President of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Maine Chapter, I am testifying in support of LD 1964 to establish Paid Family Medical Leave for Mainers. This bill is good for Maine's economy, good for Mainer's emotional and physical health, and can decrease participation in Mainer's participation in traditional welfare programs. If not passed, the financial, emotional, and physical strains on family caregivers will continue, if not worsen.

Over my 30+ year career providing clinical services, I have witnessed the physical, emotional, and economic toll that has been put on family's, mostly women, in caring for loved one's in times of need, whether that be for infants, children, spouses, or elderly family members. Two-thirds of Mainers do NOT have access to Paid Family Medical Leave. The Family Medical Leave Act that was passed in 1993 has been helpful for professional women, yet disproportionately excludes low-income workers.

Economic Impact: Eleven States, including Colorado, Oregon, Maryland, and Connecticut, plus Washington, D.C., have passed paid family and medical leave programs. Costs have been lower than expected, employers have seen increased retention and improved morale, and workers can care for their loved ones without risking their jobs. Other research is beginning to show that states with Paid Family Medical Leave have seen decreases in participation in TANF (Ybarra, 2023) and nutrition supplement (SNAP) programs (Bellisle, 2022) for new mothers.

Emotional Impact: Dozens of studies have found that family members caring for ill relatives are more prone to developing depression than their same-age peers who aren't caregiving. The risk of depression increases the longer the stint of caregiving is needed. I have witnessed caregivers in my family and my clients, slowly decreasing participation in social activities, missing, or not scheduling their own medical appointments, or exercising (Jacobs).

Health Impact: Paid Family Medical Leave is associated with a greater likelihood for breastfeeding in new mothers, decreased likelihood of Post-Partum Depression in mothers on Medicaid (Perry, 2023), decreased risk for hospitalization of women and infants and higher odds of doing well with exercise and stress management (Jou, 2018). At the other end of the lifespan, I witnessed my own mother's health deteriorate as she cared for my father, whose multiple strokes that began 10 years prior to his death impacted his ability to talk and care for

himself. The baby boomer generation is reaching their 80's and with this burgeoning elderly population, physical needs and dependence will be increasing, producing stress and strain on their adult children.

NASW Maine urges you to support LD 1964 and ensure that all working Mainers have access to Paid Family Medical Leave.

Sincerely,

Julie M. Schirmer, LCSW
President of the Board
Chair, Policy Committee
NASW Maine Chapter

References

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Jacobs, B.J., *The Emotional Survival Guide for Caregivers: Looking After Yourself and Your Family While Helping an Aging Parent*. The Guilford Press. New York, New York. 2006.

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<http://www.socialworkblog.org/nasw-publications/2014/01/implications-of-paid-family-leave-for-welfare-participants/>