

To: The Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

Re: 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

May 23, 2023

Jillian Foley

Westbrook, Maine

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Committee,

My name is Jillian Foley and I live in Westbrook, ME. I am submitting this testimony today in support of paid family and medical leave for Maine.

As a mom of three young children, this issue is very personal to me. I was lucky with my first born to have a job where I received paid leave for 12 weeks. My husband did not receive any leave and took a total of 2 weeks off unpaid to help. He has always felt he missed out on the early days and was not able to support me in my recovery. I also have 6-month-old twins. This time around I was not lucky enough to have paid leave. My twins were born 5 weeks early and spent 3 weeks in the NICU. My husband and I chose to take money out of savings and go into credit card debt to stay home with them longer. He took 6 weeks unpaid. I took 17 weeks. NICU parents and parents of multiples have very little choice in going back to work even if they want to. The demands of NICU stays and the amount of care required for newborn twins requires is hard to imagine until you experience it. It is even more complicated when you have older children. Paid leave would have been extremely helpful and made this time much easier. I hope that in the future other Maine families will have this option.

I also hold a Master's degree in Public Policy and I can tell you that this is not only a parent's issue, but this is an equity issue. The majority of care work is done by women and women are the ones losing out on pay when they need to take family leave. This is also sound economic policy and a public health matter. All of the research about paid leave points to the fact that it is shown to improve outcomes such as the health and wellbeing for both mothers and their babies in the short and long term. It not only improves maternal mental health, but it also impacts success rates of breastfeeding, which also suffers when mom's return to work too early. In addition, parental leave for non-birthing partners allows for a more equal distribution of child rearing care and responsibilities. In the case of multiples, or parents with older siblings, dual parent leave is essential. However, not every family has the privilege to take unpaid leave and no parent should have to make these tough choices.

Furthermore, this bill would also benefit any Maine worker who needs to take family or medical leave, not just parents. Those who may need to care for aging parents, or those who need a medical procedure can do so without losing income. The opposition is concerned about the funding, but this bill outlines a clear plan for funding this program with minimal burden on employers and employees.

This is one of the most important bills to support Maine's families and it will have a huge impact on the long-term stability of our communities. For these reasons, I ask that you vote in support of LD 1964. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jillian Foley

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jillian Foley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.