

**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**

Rev. Dr. Allen Ewing-Merrill  
Portland, 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 Rev. Dr. Allen Ewing-Merrill, and my family and I live in Portland. I wish to offer written testimony in strong support for paid family and medical leave for Maine.

When my wife and I welcomed our first child almost 17 years ago, I was very grateful to have employment that offered six weeks of paid paternity leave, while my wife received twelve. This was not an opportunity that we took for granted; I was very much aware that many of our friends and family members were not so fortunate. Those weeks were so precious and necessary, giving us time to forge relationships of care — new parents and new infant, on a roller-coaster ride together, sleepless nights, demanding days, and all the rest — and to adjust to the life-altering, often challenging realities that come with welcoming a new child into the home and family. When my spouse went back to work, we were fortunate to have circles of love and care surrounding us, providing meals, and assisting with care, as well as jobs that allowed for flexibility with our work schedules so we could juggle the thousands of daily logistics. Even with these privileges, which many people do not enjoy, we found that we could not imagine what it would be like to have less than twelve weeks of leave.

As you no doubt know, nearly every other industrialized country on the planet provides guaranteed paid parental leave. Their citizens and leaders have rightly determined that providing paid leave when a new baby is born is the kind, just, and necessary thing to do. In this regard (as with universal health care), the United States of America is an outlier. The other day I read a study, published in 2019, which indicated that globally, the average paid maternity leave is 29 weeks, and the average paid paternity leave is 16 weeks. This same study concluded that the United States is one of only six countries in the world — and the only rich country — without any form of national paid leave. I consider this a source of shame and sadness.

I know there are financial implications that come with any bill like this, but I would respectfully suggest that the investments we make in our youngest citizens, our youngest neighbors — the families in our state who are raising young children in the midst of a very complicated, demanding time in our society — are among the most important uses of our shared resources. Investments we make in the flourishing of families will come back to us in myriad ways. By the same token, withholding the very basic care that a family requires when a baby is born, or failing to adopt provisions for that care when the opportunity exists, will continue to perpetuate deprivation, struggle, stress, and loss.

Please do the right thing: Lend your full support to LD 1964: an Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program. This proposal before you is critically important, and the time is now.

Thank you for considering my testimony. I wish you the very best as you make critically important decisions.

With gratitude and hope,

Rev. Dr. Allen Ewing-Merrill  
Portland