

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*

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Brooke Barron and I am speaking in my capacity as a mother to two young boys, a resident of Harpswell, and a former staffer in the Maine State Legislature. I strongly urge you to support LD 1964.

In late 2020, I found out that I was pregnant with my second child. My husband and I were thrilled for our growing family and worried for the world we were introducing him into. The country was still largely shut down due to COVID, we were many months away from vaccine eligibility, my husband couldn't come with me to my prenatal appointments or most of my ultrasounds, and we were nervous about what viruses our 2 year old might bring home from daycare. It was a scary time to be pregnant.

As a legislative employee, I was entitled to 2 weeks of paid leave immediately following the birth of my son, plus 6 weeks of short-term disability, when I would receive partial pay. After that, I had job protection for 4 additional weeks, but without pay. I knew from experience that it would be impossible to find childcare for a 12 week old baby — newborn care is simply not an option in most parts of Maine. I also knew that I would not be emotionally equipped to leave my newborn with someone else so early on, or physically prepared to return to work while in what's known as the "4th trimester," a time of intense hormonal shifts, grueling recovery, and challenging — though rewarding — establishment of breastfeeding. I needed that time at home with my newborn baby.

This story has a happy ending, because I had the good fortune of working for Speaker Ryan Fecteau at the time. When I told Speaker Fecteau and his Chief of Staff, Megan Rochelo, that I was pregnant, they made it clear that they wanted me to have the time I needed to bond with and care for my baby, and we made a plan to cover my work while I was gone, and for me to return when I was ready. I pieced together sick leave and vacation days and partial pay and was able to devote those precious early months to caring for my darling newborn boy and my sweet toddler as we adjusted to life as a family of 4. When it was time, I was able to return to my position as Senior Policy Advisor to the Speaker, physically recovered and emotionally prepared to jump back in with both feet.

But — it shouldn't be about good fortune. Every family in Maine deserves that happy ending when they welcome a new baby into their family.

If the situation had been different, and I hadn't had a supportive boss, I would have left the workforce. While it would have caused financial strain, as a second-time parent, I would not have hesitated — I knew how deeply it mattered to me to be home with my child during his first months of life, and I wouldn't have traded that for any job. Paid family leave is an economic necessity, a healthcare investment, and a moral imperative. Maine's future depends on young people being able to thrive and grow their families here. I strongly urge you to support LD 1964.