

Joseph Leonard
Bangor
LD 1964

Chairman, esteemed members of the Maine Committee on Labor and Housing, I come before you today to emphasize the urgent need for the implementation of paid family and medical leave benefits through LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program. I implore you to recognize the profound economic benefits that such a policy would unleash, fostering a healthier economy and a more resilient workforce for the great state of Maine.

Let us first draw inspiration from countries across the globe that have already embraced pro-labor practices, including paid family and medical leave. Nations such as Sweden, Denmark, and Norway have long recognized the inherent value of investing in their workforce, leading to robust economies and enviable standards of living. These countries understand that a healthy labor force is not merely a cost but a valuable asset that drives productivity, innovation, and economic growth.

By implementing paid family and medical leave, we send a powerful message to workers in Maine—that we prioritize their well-being, their families, and their ability to balance work and personal responsibilities. This policy not only ensures that workers have the necessary support during crucial life events but also nurtures their loyalty, commitment, and productivity. A healthier workforce leads to reduced turnover, increased employee satisfaction, and heightened levels of engagement, all of which directly contribute to a more prosperous economy.

Moreover, paid family and medical leave is not an economic burden but a wise investment in our society. Studies from around the world consistently demonstrate that such policies yield positive economic outcomes. For instance, a study conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that countries with generous family leave policies experienced higher female labor force participation rates, contributing to stronger economic growth. In fact, for every 10 percentage points increase in female employment, GDP per capita rose by nearly 3%.

Let us not fall into the trap of short-sighted thinking, my esteemed committee members. Failure to invest in our workforce, to provide the support and protection they deserve, can have disastrous consequences for our economy. It leads to increased turnover, reduced productivity, and diminished worker morale. It perpetuates a cycle of inequality, wherein those who cannot afford to take time off work face undue hardships, and the most vulnerable among us suffer the most.

As Upton Sinclair, the great American author and advocate for workers' rights, once wrote, "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it." We must rise above personal interests and embrace the undeniable truth that investing in our workforce, ensuring their well-being, and granting them paid family and medical leave is not only morally right but also economically imperative.

The time has come to take a stand, to create a robust safety net that supports the workers of Maine. By passing LD 1964 and implementing a paid family and medical leave benefits program, we declare that we are committed to cultivating a healthier economy, a more equitable society, and a workforce that thrives. Let us not shy away from our responsibility, but rather embrace the vision of a brighter future, where workers are empowered, families are supported, and our economy flourishes. The choice is clear, my friends. Let us choose progress, let us choose compassion, and let us choose economic prosperity. Thank you.