



24-Hour Helpline: 1.800.863.9909

PO Box 653, Bangor, ME 04402

partnersforpeaceme.org

May 25, 2023

Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
c/o Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Amanda Cost, and I am the Executive Director of Partners for Peace. On behalf of our organization and the survivors we serve, I urge you to support paid safe leave for survivors of domestic abuse and violence in Maine.

Partners for Peace is a domestic violence resource center that has been advocating for survivors of domestic abuse for fifty years. A member of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, we are proud to be Maine's first domestic violence resource center and the nation's third oldest of its kind. It is our mission to engage individuals and the community to end domestic violence in Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties in Maine. We provide support, advocacy, and safety planning to anyone affected by domestic abuse. We foster safe and healthy relationships through prevention, education, and training. Together with our community we recognize the nature of abuse, respond to it, and change the conditions which lead to it. We believe that every person deserves to live in peace and equality, and that just and respectful relationships can change the world.

Some of the many support services provided by Partners for Peace include: 24-hour helpline, safety planning, crisis and emotional support, one on one advocacy, support and education groups, civil justice advocacy, criminal justice advocacy, court accompaniment, healthcare advocacy and hospital accompaniment, emergency shelter and housing services, transitional housing services, and children's services.

Our five decades of experience and expertise inform our viewpoint that our services are just one piece of a complex and dynamic puzzle made up of many individuals, organizations, and systems necessary to end domestic abuse and support survivors. We strongly support Safe Leave as a missing puzzle piece and essential response to helping survivors access safety and security.

Seeking safety from abuse is time-intensive labor that may require survivors to take countless hours away from work. Examples include taking time to call our Helpline or meet with an advocate to safety plan, communicate with law enforcement, complete paperwork to submit a protection from abuse order, attend court hearings, navigate housing options, and access healthcare. These activities are even more time-intensive for survivors who live in rural areas and may not have access to transportation or internet/technology. Many survivors contact us needing gas money, taxi fare, or financial support for car

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repairs. While we can often connect them with resources to address these barriers, they also need Safe Leave to protect their jobs and income.

People who experience domestic abuse have high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder. With access to treatment and other supports, healing is possible, but may take months or even years. Safe Leave can help to remove one of the many barriers that can impede healing and promote increased health and well-being.

We can also share our perspective as a small nonprofit employer with 26 full-time staff. In addition to parental leave for childbirth, several staff have faced unexpected health challenges in the past year, resulting in the need for paid leave. In spring 2022, we were excited to begin offering an employer paid short-term disability insurance plan for all our employees. This plan provides 60% of income for up to 12 weeks, depending on the nature of the illness. Employees can then use other accrued paid sick and PTO leave to make up the difference in income. This short-term disability plan has provided some benefit but has not provided the level of protection our employees truly need and deserve. For example, uncomplicated labor and delivery only merits six weeks of disability payments and a standard c-section delivery covers eight weeks. Moreover, this policy does not offer any support for other types of parental leave, including for adoption, or for employees who need to care for sick family members. As an organization that values all of our employees and their families, universal paid family leave is essential.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support for universal paid family leave and, in particular, the ability of survivors to have paid leave while they accomplish the tasks essential to keeping them and their children safe.

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