

Joan Beal
Norway
LD 406

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Norway Maine
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Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Honorable Members of the Labor Committee.

I appreciate this opportunity to address the Committee today. My name is Joan Beal and I am a resident of Norway. I am here in opposition to LD 406 and all the proposed bills which would weaken the Paid Family and Medical Leave Program.

Paid Family and Medical Leave needs its chance to work. We must cut it off at the knees before it has the opportunity to prove its value. The majority of Maine people support this program. It works smoothly in 13 other states and many other countries, providing the time and the means for families to deal with joyful and sorrowful turning points in family life, without the financial stress and emotional burden of having to decide whether they may lose their jobs, have to retire early, or go into debt in order to care for their family. Doing our best for Maine families needs to be the priority here, especially when they face life defining events, which can make or break family life and relationships.

As someone who has been a care giver, a parent, a foster parent, and a relative of people who needed end of life care, I can testify to the stress of managing these circumstances. My sister and brother-in-law, in caring for my terminally ill mother-in-law, were juggling two small children, full time jobs, and mortgages and debts which made it impossible for them to take time off from work. They deserved to have dignified and quality time to accompany my mother-in-law through this hardest of journeys, without feeling guilty or negligent in making the choice to financially support their family.

When my son and daughter-in-law adopted a child 13 years ago, they had only a week to prepare and several tense weeks in another state as they waited for the final legal requirements to be completed. Fortunately for them they had enough money to take this time to complete the process and then bond with their new baby. Most people are not so lucky. Shouldn't all new parents and new babies have this critical time together? Research shows that this early bonding time is crucial for infant and parental development and healthy families make healthy communities as well. For everyone....not just the affluent.

When I grew up and came of age, there was no family leave act of any kind, either with or without pay. If you were lucky, you hoped you had enough money put aside to deal with this kind of emergency. My father had multiple sclerosis. As it progressed and he became unable to get around, my mother had to retire early from her well loved job, and lose the option of a better pension. Each of my siblings and I spent some anxious times wondering if whether, when the end approached, my mother would still be able to care for him or if one or several of us would have to leave a career to help care for our father. And, as we know all too well, it is usually the women in the family that take on these responsibilities.

I am aware that this costs money. If I were still in the work force, I would consider my contribution well worth the cost. If I had continued to manage an organization, I would consider the employer contribution well worth the cost. These events, both welcome and unwelcome, can happen to any of us at any time and when there is an effective program, like paid family medical leave to insure resilience and dignity to Maine families, we should be celebrating it. I urge you to allow this program to be implemented as planned and to vote "ought not to pass" to all attempts to weaken or abolish it.

Thank you.