

April 23, 2025

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1712 -An Act to Amend the Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program to Balance Support of Businesses and Employees

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Esteemed Members of the Committee on Labor,

I am Jessica Linzer Simpson, from Cape Elizabeth and a volunteer/advocate with AARP Maine.

I am writing to urge you to oppose LD 1712 although I believe the sponsors made a good faith effort, in a bipartisan manner, to ease employer concerns about a new program. But, some of these changes go too far and deprive too many of Maine's employees of a critical safety net; receiving pay when ill or needing to care for a family member who is ill.

We all know life and health can change in an instant. When it does change, we still need to pay our rent, our mortgages, buy food, put the lights and heat on, and we need to concentrate on getting well instead of worrying about a total loss of income.

Yet, *Section 1, subsection 7* allows employers falling into many different categories to claim hardship exemptions and deny the program to their workers. Examples stated in the bill: employers with less than 15 workers, employers who are seasonal, employers who generate their most income during our tourist season, and an amorphous catchall that allows any employer to decide for any reason that granting leave to an employee is an undue hardship. It ends with a kicker that the denial is not appealable!

My career was at the Social Security Administration and I see that language, and language in a number of the other bills you will be discussing today as akin to the debates around the beginning of the Social Security program in 1935. At inception, some of the arguments against Social Security were cost, potential for misuse, higher taxes and being a burden to employers. But, as Social Security approaches its 90th birthday, we now know how critical this program is. It lifts people out of poverty and it garners support with overwhelming majorities of Americans who wish it to remain strong and be there for us - today, tomorrow and for generations to come!

I bring up the establishment of Social Security to highlight that we find ourselves in a similar moment in Maine. We have seen the great crisis from the onset of COVID-19 and the ongoing issues of a dearth of healthcare workers to provide care for people either in their home or in a long-term care facility if they can secure a bed.

We find ourselves in a moment where a worker in Maine could be forced to sacrifice their financial security in order to care for their loved one. When that happens; when a worker leaves their job, and forgoes a paycheck to provide care; this decision has long term effects.

On the Damariscotta River in Newcastle, Maine, there's a new center honoring the first woman holding a Cabinet position, Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins. As an original architect of the Social Security Act, she said "We cannot be satisfied merely with makeshift arrangements which will tide us over the present emergencies. We must devise plans that will not merely alleviate the ills of today but will prevent their recurrence in the future."

Maine took that step with passing the Paid Family and Medical Leave program in 2023. This is just the program and policy that can protect families from financial insecurity in a time of hardship. Let's reject many of the changes proposed in LD 1712 which threaten the long term health of the program and the ability of many Mainers to access and benefit from the original legislation in the program.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on LD 1712.

Thank you for all you do for the people and the State of Maine.

Sincerely,

Jessica