

Melissa Weglein
Portland, ME
LD 1712

Hello Senator Tipping, Representative, Roeder, and members of the Committee on Labor. My name is Melissa Weglein and I live in Portland. Today I am writing in strong opposition to LD 1712, and asking you vote Ought Not to Pass.

I am extremely concerned about provisions in this bill that change the wage replacement model in the currently designed Paid Family and Medical Leave program. Should this bill pass, individuals with lower earnings will not be able to access this program that was designed for them.

In fall of 2024, my union bargained for improvements to our lackluster Family and Medical Leave policy with the promise that when the State program went into effect, we would fully transition to it. Previous to this, I watched colleagues return to work earlier than was medically advisable from births, injuries, and knee surgeries because we were not eligible for more than 60% of our salaries on leave until we hit three years of employment, regardless of how close or far we were from a living wage.

We were able to use the State program as a bargaining chip to improve our benefits in the interim, and trusted that we would be taken care of by our lawmakers come 2026 when we would transition to Maine's program.

I am disappointed to learn that if it goes into effect, this bill will open the door for unfair denials of leave under expanded hardship exemptions, bar employees from advocating for themselves when those leaves are denied and their jobs are lost, and take away a union's right to bargain with their employers over these critical benefits if enrolled in this program.

LD 1712 undoes crucial work done to protect the health and wellbeing of low- and middle-income Mainers, and risks access for those who need it most before it has even begun. Personally, this feels like a betrayal of the trust that my colleagues and I put in our representatives when we put our lives and our families' lives in the hands of a still-developing program less than a year ago.

This is why I am asking you to reject any bill that changes the current program.

Thank you for reading my testimony. I urge you to vote Ought Not to Pass on any bill that makes substantial changes to the Paid Family and Medical Leave program.

Sincerely,
Melissa Weglein