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Public Testimony regarding LDs 406, 539, 952, 1169, 1221, 1249, 1273, 1307,
1333, 1400, 1712

My name is Aspen Ruhlin, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Mabel Wadsworth Center. First, I would like to thank the Chairs Senator Tipping and Representative Roeder, as well as the other members of the Labor Committee. Mabel Wadsworth Center is an independent, feminist, not-for-profit sexual and reproductive health center in Bangor that provides a wide range of services, including abortion care, prenatal care, STI testing and treatment, contraceptives, gender-affirming hormone therapy, and primary care. Along with providing care to those in our community who will benefit greatly from being able to access Paid Family Medical Leave, our Center is an employer that supports this program and the ways it will benefit our staff. For this reason, we urge you to vote “ought not to pass” on the slate of bills that seek to either fully remove PFML from Mainers or to limit the program’s positive impact.

With the care we provide at Mabel Wadsworth Center, we see firsthand every single day how a lack of paid family and medical leave harms our community. Currently, too many new parents are forced back to work not only when they should be bonding with their babies, but before their bodies are healed from birth. People are making pregnancy and family-building decisions not influenced primarily by their own desires, but by the lack of supports in place. This brings to mind a patient who terminated a pregnancy because she had been forced to return to work two weeks after a C-section with her first pregnancy, and she knew she could not do it again. Mainers deserve better. Mainers deserve to care for themselves and their families in communities that care for and support them, and paid leave is essential to that.

While those welcoming a new child into their family are an important group positively impacted by the PFML program, there are many other folks who will



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benefit from access as well. There are, of course, those caring for a sick or elderly family member, or those dealing with their own health issues. PFML also includes coverage for those who need leave due to experiencing domestic violence and/or sexual violence. Every day, we at Mabel Wadsworth Center provide care to those who have been subjected to violence by someone who they should have been able to trust. Navigating safety in these situations is case-by-case, and having the leave offered by PFML is essential to supporting victims and survivors of violence.

Mabel Wadsworth Center supports PFML not just for our patients, but for our staff and for all workers in Maine. Those opposed to PFML have often leaned on the tired argument of harm to small businesses. While Mabel Wadsworth Center is a non-profit, our small staff size places us in that category. We support PFML because workers are people, and people deserve paid leave to care for themselves and their families. Others have discussed how healthy workers are better workers, which is absolutely true, but more important than that is that people deserve happy and healthy lives where they can care for themselves and their loved ones without added financial burdens. Additionally, some business owners opposed to the PFML program have cited that the program is too confusing to contribute to. Our Co-Director whose area of focus is finance, including making sure staff get paid, has reported that, “most of the behind the scenes pieces of contributing to PFML has happened through our payroll company,” and that things have been extremely easy on her end.

The people of Maine deserve access to PFML, and the proposed modifications to the program would harm Mainers. We urge you to vote “ought not to pass” on this slate of bills. Thank you.