



Committee on Labor

Testimony in Support of: L.D. 575 and L.D. 894

Testimony in Opposition to: L.D.s 406, 539, 952, 1169, 1221, 1249, 1273, 1307, 1333, 1400, 1712

April 23, 2025

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished members of the Committee on Labor,

My name is Heide Lester, and I am the Deputy Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. I am submitting this testimony on behalf of EqualityMaine and our colleagues at GLAD Law and MaineTransNet in staunch support of Maine's Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program and in opposition to the exclusion of certain workers and other attempts to diminish, hinder, or repeal PFML.

LGBTQ+ people face a variety of unique challenges including well-documented health disparities, elevated risk of violence, and employment insecurity, as well as high uninsurance rates, lack of cultural competency among healthcare providers, and the pressures of minority stress associated with a legacy of isolation and discrimination.¹ PFML is part of a suite of policy changes that would help mitigate many of these difficulties.

Maine's PFML program was thoughtfully designed with great focus on inclusion, diverse stakeholder input, and economic feasibility as well as the belief that no one should have to choose between their livelihood and caring for a loved one. This should extend to all working Mainers whether to care for oneself or a family member with a serious health condition, bond with a child after birth, adoption, or foster placement, or to address issues arising from domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking.

The evidence is clear: programs like Maine's PFML help workers and their families and benefit employers.² Our state's program will improve the health of Mainers across generations, add stability to our workforce, and reduce the stress on families - but we must allow it to take effect.

Thank you,

Heide Lester (they/them)

¹ Ard, Kevin L. and Harvey J. Makadon, "Improving the Health Care of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) People: Understanding and Eliminating Health Disparities." *The Fenway Institute*, 2012, lgbtqihealtheducation.org/wp-content/uploads/Improving-the-Health-of-LGBT-People.pdf; Baker, Kellan and Andrew Cray. "Moving the Needle." *Center for American Progress*, americanprogress.org/article/moving-the-needle/.

² "Paid Leave Works: Evidence from State Programs." *National Partnership for Women & Families*, 2023, nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/paid-leave-works-evidence-from-state-programs.pdf.