



February 10, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and the Joint Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for gender-responsive and gender-equitable public policies, with a focus on those most affected by misogyny, sexism, and other forms of oppression. We support systems and proposals which increase the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of all people in Maine. We are before you today **Neither For Nor Against LD 258, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations.**

The Maine Women's Lobby is the proud convener of the Maine Paid Leave Coalition, a group of nearly 40 partner organizations representing hundreds of thousands of Mainers. Together we are working to create a paid family and medical leave system that works for all Mainers, leaving no one behind.

This was a big week for Paid Family and Medical Leave in Maine, as the Commission on PFML made their final bipartisan report after 18 months of committed, careful work. The executive report emphatically states: **"The Commission unanimously supports the enactment of a paid family and medical leave program."**

Along with my partners at the Coalition, Commission members, and Mainers from every county and walk of life, we respectfully request that you appropriate the funds necessary to advance the work of the Paid Family and Medical Leave Commission and to build the infrastructure required to make their recommendations a reality.

There has never been a better time to enact a system of Paid Family and Medical Leave for Maine.

- The Commission has presented a **thoughtful bipartisan proposal that is accessible and affordable.**
- Nonpartisan statewide polling shows that **70 percent of Mainers – a majority of every single demographic, party, and region polled – support the creation of this program.**
- **This self-sustaining program simply needs start-up investment.** There is no more appropriate use of our current budget surplus than a one-time investment in infrastructure that would support nearly all Mainers.
- Since the pandemic, the call for care infrastructure has grown. This was echoed in the words of the representative from the US Chamber of Commerce, who shared with the Commission last December that they understood that **"it is no longer a matter of whether, but when and how" to enact paid family and medical leave.**

The time is now.

The budgetary implications for this program are relatively modest, in light of the costs of inaction. Without a system of PFML, families go without paychecks while they provide infant

care, since childcare is not affordable or accessible for most families, and not possible for infants under 12 weeks old in most cases – or worse, they are forced to make impossible choices. As a long-time member of Maine’s Homicide Review Panel, I observed many cases of families where safe, affordable early infant care did not exist without PFML. Without a statewide system, small businesses are forced to either pick up the tab on their own, or to watch their employees choose between their families and their paychecks. Or they simply can’t compete for employees with larger, better funded employers. Without PFML, women have left the workforce at the highest rate in 30 years<sup>1</sup>, largely to provide unpaid caregiving for their families. The burden of most of Maine’s care falls on women<sup>2</sup>, and without statewide investment, we are saying that it is acceptable that women must pay the costs, through part-time work, lower-paying jobs, and loss of retirement savings – all proven side effects of lack of our caregiving structures.

When parents are about to give birth. When the doctor calls with a cancer diagnosis. When our parents and partners enter hospice. We never tell our families that it’s not the right time. In this moment, with a bipartisan plan on the table and a revenue surplus, how can we tell our family of Mainers that it is not the right time? Now is the time, and we can’t afford to wait.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



**Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director**

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<sup>1</sup> National Women’s Law center. (2023). Another 275,000 Women Left the Workforce in January. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/resource/january-jobs-day-2021/>

<sup>2</sup> The Cutler Institute of Health Policy. (2022). The Economic Security of Older Women in Maine: A Data Report. Retrieved from <https://www.mainewomen.org/s/Older-women-economic-security.pdf>