



TESTIMONY

In Support of

LD 999 An Act to Support Family Caregivers by Expanding Family Medical Leave

Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

March 30, 2023

Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Good afternoon, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing.

My name is Laura Harper and I am a Senior Associate at Moose Ridge Associates. I am here today to present testimony in support of this legislation on behalf of the Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

The Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is a non-profit agency that provides statewide advocacy services for residents of nursing homes, assisted housing, assisted living and for recipients of home care. Additionally, the program provides assistance to patients in hospitals who experience barriers in accessing the long-term services and supports they need when they are ready for discharge.

This legislation adds grandparents and great-grandparents with serious health conditions to the list of persons related to an employee for whom family medical leave may be taken. It also provides that an employee may take family medical leave for any of the persons listed with a serious health condition who are related by blood, adoption, legal custody, marriage or domestic partnership.

Over and over again, Ombudsman Program staff have observed the enormous value and dedication of family caregivers. These individuals step in often with little support, to provide care to keep a loved one at home. Their role has become even more critical as Maine has experienced a significant direct care workforce shortage. Across the state, there are an

estimated 166,000 family caregivers. *Valuing the Invaluable 2023 Update: Strengthening Supports for Family Caregiving*, AARP Policy Institute. Often these family caregivers are employed, managing both work commitments and the care of a loved one. In fact, sixty-one percent work either full or part time. *AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving 2020*

Expansion of family medical leave to include grandparents and great-grandparents required by this legislation is an important step forward that will provide needed support to family caregivers who are employed. As Maine's population over sixty-five is the most rapidly expanding, the need for the care of a grandparent and great-grandparent is likely to occur more often. Additionally, *Caregiving in the U.S. 2020* indicates that 17% of caregivers reported taking care of grandparents or grandparents-in-law.

There is a direct benefit to the employer when family medical leave is provided, promoting retention of employees and reducing costs for recruitment. Support for employed family caregivers is critical in maintaining their employment and in preventing the loss of a job and economic hardship.

About one in seven of us is serving as a family caregiver. All too often, family caregivers go unrecognized and unsupported. Family caregivers are in many ways as important to providing care as are direct care staff. Fortunately, more attention is being focused on this important group. Congress passed the RAISE Family Caregiver Act of 2017 that established the RAISE Family Caregiver Advisory Council to advise and provide recommendations to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to support family caregivers. One of the recommendations of the Council is strengthening state Family and Medical Leave Acts to protect the employment of family caregivers.

We urge your support for this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration.