

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Labor and Housing Committee: My name is Rebecca Scarborough, and I live in Camden. I am testifying today to ask this committee to support LD 1964, which would create a Paid Family and Medical Leave program for workers in Maine. This is a personal issue to me.

Eight days after I turned thirty, I had an aortic dissection (a tear in my aorta) that caused a stroke. I had emergency heart surgery and spent three weeks in in-patient rehabilitation, relearning how to walk and regaining strength on my left side. A month later, I was hospitalized again due to an infection in the surgical site. I stayed for four weeks, enduring seven surgeries.

During these difficult months, my mother took time off from work to be with me. For almost the entire time I was in the hospital, she was beside me and able to help me when nurses were unavailable. When I was released from the hospital after the infection, I still needed IV antibiotics, and my mother learned how to give me those medications herself.

My mom ended up retiring early from a full-time position to take care of me. She took care of me physically and took over the logistics of scheduling doctor appointments and outpatient therapies that I did not have the mental capacity to handle.

We were fortunate, and even with the loss of my mother's income my family was able to take care of me while I healed. We were all safe. Unfortunately, too many people in Maine are not in the same situation. No one should have to go into debt or lose their house or job to care for themselves or a loved one. Paid leave would allow Mainers to care for themselves and loved ones during medical crises and recoveries.

Maine's PFML commission has made recommendations for establishing a paid and family medical leave program in Maine. There are areas where this bill can be even stronger. For example, this bill exempts small businesses from certain parts of the law, which means that small business owners may be able to retaliate against workers trying to use the paid leave program. This could mean that businesses may not hold jobs for people, and workers may avoid taking time off out of fear they will lose their jobs. Currently, this bill would also allow the state to privatize this program, and this needs to be run by and for the public.

However, this bill is a major and important first step in protecting the rights of all Maine workers. I urge this committee to move this bill forward and make the necessary changes to make it even stronger.

Thank you for your time.