

February 10, 2023

Testimony in support of LD1964

Good Afternoon, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: My name is Star Pelsue and I am a resident of Portland, Maine. I am writing today in support of LD 1965 An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.

Paid Family Medical Leave is crucial in supporting Maine families as they care for their loved ones. The program is one that could alleviate one additional stress during what for most is a highly stressful time. Eleven years ago, my youngest brother and his family stationed in Guam sent the wonderful news that his latest child had been born. Our families were excited at the news of another girl. Six weeks later we received the devastating news that my niece had a massive stroke. The military was sending the family to the hospital in Pearl Harbor. After several days we received word that the doctors there believed my niece had contracted meningitis which resulted in the stroke, damaging 85% of the brain. It was determined that she was born with Severe Combined Immune Deficiency (SCID). The Air Force transferred my brother and his family stateside to the Charleston, South Carolina area because of their immunity ward. It didn't take long for them to find that my niece Fiona was the worst case that they had seen, and they recommended that she see the specialist who created the protocol for treating SCID. This Dr. and her team were located at the Duke medical center in North Carolina. In the meantime, my brother's oldest child who was 2 at the time was being bounced around from family member to family member. Each took vacation time to be home with the toddler until it was the turn of the next relative who had time to donate to her care. I am fortunate that the school I was teaching at let me take leave so I could move into my brother's home to be the caregiver while he, his wife, and Fiona went to North Carolina for a year!

My family always comes first. I didn't flinch when I offered my support during this difficult time. A child we were told would never walk or talk and likely not be expected to make it to her first birthday. If it meant eating ramen noodles or working 2 jobs when I returned to straighten out the loss of my paycheck I would gladly do it again. I worry about families who can't afford to pay for the caregiving of a child or parent and need to leave work to do so. I hope you will Maine families and vote for this much-needed program. It was the most stressful year for both sides of our family. As a volunteer at Ronald McDonald House in Portland, I worry about the families who need our services. Those that have short or long stays would have one less thing to worry about if our state had Paid Family and Medical Leave. We have states in this country that have been able to successfully implement similar types of programs.

I urge you to support this all-important program that will help all Maine residents at some point in their life. Many women shoulder the brunt of the financial setback while caring for a loved one. The Cutler Institute report in 2022 on the Economic Security in Women in Maine paints a bleak picture. LD 1964 can help caretakers who are generally women. One never knows which curve ball may come one's way, but this will help lessen the burden when that occurs.

Thank you,

Star Pelsue