

May 25, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished members of the Labor & Housing Committee:

My name is Amanda Hatch and I submit this testimony on behalf of YWCA Central Maine in Lewiston, Maine. **I am here to offer YWCA Central Maine's support of LD 1964, "An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program."** Thank you to Senator Daughtry & Representative Cloutier for co-sponsoring this bill.

YWCA Central Maine is a Lewiston-based non-profit that provides programming and advocacy in service of our mission to eliminate racism and empower women. Our largest program is childcare: YWCA provides care for more than 100 local children and their families in any given day. In fact, we are among the few childcare providers that remained open at expanded capacity throughout COVID-19. This also means that, throughout the years, YWCA staff have witnessed first-hand the devastating effects the lack of a universal paid leave system has on our communities.

Our childcare director has comforted parents as they sob on the phone, afraid they will lose their job for missing work after we tell them their child is sick and must remain at home for several days—often longer for families with multiple children. YWCA administrators have helped caregivers access our on-site food pantry when they were unsure how they would put dinner on the table after taking unpaid time off due to illness or injuries. Teachers have connected worried families with community resources to make up for the income lost while caring for sick family members.

We regularly see sick parents dropping off healthy children, only to suffer through their own workday (and put others at risk of contracting the same illness) because they've already exhausted all earned time caring for others. Sadly, more than one parent has balanced chemotherapy, caregiving, and work, when extended *paid* leave was not available and *unpaid* leave was not an option.

**This is unsustainable.** We *must* have systems in place to support those supporting others. A single mother should not have to choose between caring for herself, her child, her aging parent...or losing her sole source of income and insurance. **If the pandemic taught us anything, it's that we should not—cannot—force people to work when they are sick or send their sick children to care so they can work.** It puts everyone at risk. But these are the only options for so many in Maine right now.

The need for a robust paid leave system in Maine is as much a human rights issue, as an equity issue, as a workforce development issue, as a health issue. Benefits like paid leave substantially affect caregivers' ability to manage work-life balance, their own health, and their lifetime earning potential.<sup>1</sup> Here at the YWCA, we are particularly concerned about the disproportionate impact a lack of paid leave has on local women, immigrants, and Black workers, who statistically continue to be underpaid and underemployed across all sectors of the economy, often lacking financial safety nets and comprehensive benefit supports.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

Our own employees are no exception: even as a non-profit, the YWCA offers generous earned paid leave benefits to full-time employees that include paid time off for parental leave, bereavement, illnesses, and more; however, 67% of our staff are part-time workers who do not qualify for earned paid leave benefits beyond the little that is currently required by state law—reflective of the state-wide estimate that 73% of workers do not have paid leave through their jobs.<sup>4</sup> Again, as a non-profit, we simply cannot shoulder the costs to offer these benefits to all employees *despite knowing the impact this has on those most affected by our mission*. **Like many employers in Maine, we both strongly support—and would directly benefit from—a comprehensive, public paid leave system.**

Maine urgently needs a comprehensive and universal paid leave program for all workers. YWCA Central Maine hopes you will vote 'ought to pass' on LD 1964.

Thank you.

Amanda Hatch | Chief Program & Impact Officer | YWCA Central Maine

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<sup>1</sup> Politico LLC (2022). The Pandemic Has Created Two Very Different Kinds of Workplaces. That Especially Matters for Women. Retrieved from: <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2022/12/05/women-rule-child-care-00071707>

<sup>2</sup> Chicago Tribune (2021). Moms, particularly Black moms, are bearing the brunt of job losses during the pandemic, setting back efforts to climb the economic ladder. Retrieved from: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-women-unemployment-pandemic-20210205-jbqtxyqmffxrgzny7popi32yy-story.html>

<sup>3</sup> Pew Research Center (2015). Women more than men adjust their careers for family life. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/10/01/women-more-than-men-adjust-their-careers-for-family-life/>

<sup>4</sup> National Partnership for Women & Families (2023). Paid Leave Means a Stronger Maine. Retrieved from: <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/paid-leave-means-a-stronger-maine.pdf>