

Richard Bissell, Auburn  
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Sen. Tipping, Rep. Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: My name is Richard Bissell. I am a resident of Auburn, Maine, and am 81 years of age. My prior history of relevance includes serving as a Field Hospital Medic in the U.S. Army, and 29 years of nursing experience in a hospital Emergency Department. I presently volunteer with the Maine People's Alliance, with whose support I appear here today.

I testify today in support of LD 1964.

It has been evident to Maine healthcare providers that there are harmful health effects associated with not having time off when it is needed. In response to that realization, an open letter signed by 130 healthcare professionals calls upon this body to pass a paid leave program. It has become evident to this nurse that many of my clients in the emergency department have delayed seeking care for illness or injury because they are financially needy and/or their employers won't allow them the time off for seeking care. The E.R. client is often vocal about fears of retaliation by the employer for taking time off for seeking care. This concern is also heard if the M.D. recommends time out of work for recuperation. Concern is also voiced by the E.R. patient for the income lost during recovery.

The current system of unpaid leave creates undue stress and burden upon patients and their caretakers. The USA is the only industrialized nation in the world without a paid leave program. This has resulted in 13 states and the District of Columbia setting up their own systems. Only 28% of Maine workers have access to paid leave through their

employers. Also, for lack of a paid leave program, an estimated 181,000 Mainers serve as unpaid family caregivers.

While advocates for a paid leave program hope that the legislature passes such a program, a ballot measure has been launched to ensure that the policy happens one way or another. To that end, 80,000 signatures in support of the referendum were received in the latter part of 2022. These were withheld until 2024 pending the outcome of the legislative progress with this issue.

I would like to thank the Committee for the attention that it has given and will be giving to this matter.