

Good Afternoon esteemed members of the Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Savanna Pettengill. I am a resident of Portland, an artist, active member of my community my favorite role being Aunt Savvy, and a high school special education teacher and case manager.

I am here to speak to the realities of the benefits of Paid Family Medical Leave as outlined in LD 1964.

I was raised as the oldest daughter of 3 girls by a single mother who has fought a tough battle with PTSD for the majority of my life— an illness I've often held in mind for her as one that was created by patriarchal abuses she experienced in her childhood, and as a homeless adolescent in Portland.

My grandparents and aunt helped support us with their physical presence and care. If a bill like this existed then, would they have been able to do so without so much added stress on our family unit? Regardless of financial struggles, because of this loving support system, along with the support of our school systems, we had the privilege to have a sense of community and a strong safety net emotionally that taught me the true meaning of community care.

It was because of this understanding that I became an educator after many years working in the arts and food and drink service. Due to my lack of financial support, the only means for me to be able to afford to do so was through the New York City Teaching Fellows Program, which I began in 2018. There, I was a member of the United Federation of Teachers and began to understand what was possible for lifelong stability for the first time through benefits such as comprehensive health insurance, pensions, and also paid family medical leave.

In 2020 – I was called home to Portland for many personal reasons aside from the global pandemic, including leaving an abusive relationship and the compounded grief rocked me into a state of depression that felt impossible to shake without taking a break. In many ways I began to understand the plight of my mother, and for any adult who needed just a little bit of time to take care of something medically related, with bigger consequences than missing work. I was fortunate to be able to take a medical leave to treat my depression, and had the space and time to heal before returning to work as a better teacher than I was before. At that time I witnessed friends who were unable to work due to lock-downs being able to support their loved ones through pregnancy, cancer treatments, and transitions due to aging, without added grief, thanks to the support of unemployment stimulus, if they were eligible. As we have collectively learned, time and time again, economic stress is one of the most harmful stressors one can experience in this society. As a teacher of high school students, I have witnessed our youth lose faith in the systems of our governments as we fail to provide adequate support for their families.

This bill insures a safety net that is far more than a band-aid solution for folks from every working background. This bill honors all types of families and community support networks to ensure that those who need it the most in our community have the care they need and trust, and

for those care-providers to not lose their livelihood in order to provide that care for their loved-ones. Every citizen of Maine will benefit from this bill, and what a beautiful way to show our children that our state is a place where you can not only survive, but thrive, no matter your work, and that if you ever do need care, you can receive it from those you know and trust.

Thank you for your time.