

Maggie Mansfield  
Vienna, Maine  
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Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Maggie Mansfield. I live in Vienna, Maine and am writing in support of LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.

I have long COVID. Last July, I started a new job. Last August, I caught COVID. I tested positive three days before my short and long-term disability insurance policies began and so any COVID related disability is considered a pre-existing condition. I am in my 30s and have no medical pre-existing conditions. I am not be eligible for Family Medical Leave through my employer until July. I have been disabled by long COVID for nine months and I have received no financial support.

I am incredibly fortunate in many ways. I don't have kids or family depending on me. I have a supportive partner who contributes to our household income, and we have savings. But it is hard. We are regularly dipping into our savings accounts and no longer adding to them. We've had to defer repairs on our home. We are careful to buy everything we need in town from the big stores where they're cheaper. We've stopped supporting our local stores and restaurants. We are getting by, but both our household and our community are impacted economically.

Partially, I am getting by because of my work. First off, they haven't fired me. They've provided numerous accommodations including flexible working hours and an adapted workload. After I got sick, they found ways to pay me full time for almost two months after I used up the little paid time off I'd accrued. They continue to provide me with full time benefits, including my health insurance, even though I work roughly half time. The flexibility and the job security they provide are critical to my wellbeing now, but it also ensures that when I am able to work full time again, I will be able to rebound quickly, both financially and in terms of my career goals.

For now, my priority is to rest and recover, and without a robust Paid Family and Medical Leave program in the state, I am left making difficult choices. Every day, I weigh my health against my income and have to choose which I'm going to prioritize. Currently I budget to work an average of five hours a day. Most weeks, by Friday my muscles and joints ache and my mind is alternately buzzing or blank. I collapse on the couch as soon as I'm done. I spend the weekends resting so I can make it through the next week.

I have done everything by the books. I went to college, I got a job, I went to grad school, I got a better job. This doesn't make me more worthy of support, but even with all this, I fell through the cracks and have struggled for nine months with a disabling medical condition with no financial support. Even if I magically got better tomorrow, my household will feel the effect of this financial strain for years, and in turn, that will impact my community.

Not everyone is able to drop to half time the way I have. Not everyone has a partner who can do all the housework. Not everyone has an employer that is able and willing to support their employees without an existing statewide system to make it possible. Paid leave would allow me to cut my hours and I would probably heal faster, my productivity would increase, and my stress would certainly be lower. For other families it could actually determine their ability to survive.

I'm here, with the precious little energy I have, to urge you to please support LD 1964 to keep any more people from falling through the cracks.

Thank you for your time.