



# Maine Children's Alliance

Advocating for the well-being of all Maine families.

Testimony of Stephanie Eglinton

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In Support of LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program

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Good afternoon, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Stephanie Eglinton and I am the executive director of the Maine Children's Alliance. We are a statewide, non-partisan organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies and promote best practices to improve the lives of all Maine children, youth, and families.

I offer testimony in support of LD 1964 to implement a state Paid Family and Medical Leave program. Now is the time for Maine to join the now 14 other states who have already done so. There are many compelling reasons why this policy is needed, including advancing equity, improved health outcomes for adults, and better worker retention. I will focus my testimony on the importance of paid family leave on child development and family well-being.

**The time right after a baby is born or adopted is a time of extraordinary growth, development, and connection.** We know from research that parent and caregiver connections are critical in building a strong early foundation for a baby's future development, including social, emotional, and cognitive learning.<sup>1</sup> The first years of a child's life represent the most significant period of growth for the developing brain. Early experiences – both negative and positive – shape a child's brain architecture. Just like for a house, the foundation for this brain development should be strong, through positive and nurturing interactions with the important adults in a child's early life.

These responsive relationships require care, consistency, and above all, time. With 69 percent of children under the age of six having all available parents in the workforce in Maine<sup>2</sup>, we know that most Maine families do not have the financial ability to take unpaid time off from work to be at home following the birth of a child. We need to more equitably support families as they balance family economic stability with their role as parents and caregivers. LD 1964 would enable parents to spend critical bonding time with a newborn or newly adopted or fostered child, without the financial hardship of taking time off from work without pay.

**Paid family leave improves outcomes for children.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a baby's life, given the long-term health benefits. But that can be incredibly challenging for a working mother to juggle. We know that babies of parents who

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<sup>1</sup> [Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships \(harvard.edu\)](https://www.harvard.edu/news/young-children-develop-in-an-environment-of-relationships)

<sup>2</sup> [Children under age 6 with all available parents in work force, detailed | KIDS COUNT Data Center \(aecf.org\)](https://www.aecf.org/data-center/kids-count/data-center/kids-count-data-center)

have the opportunity to take paid leave are more likely to be breastfed, and are more likely to be taken to the pediatrician for regular check-ups and be up to date on immunizations.<sup>3</sup>

The rate of infant mortality is considered an indicator of the overall health of a society. MCA reports in the 2023 Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book that Maine's infant mortality rate of 5.2 per 1,000 in 2021 was the highest in New England. Paid family leave has been linked to reduced infant mortality in other countries. A study on the impact of California's paid leave policy found that it reduced postnatal mortality by 12 percent.<sup>4</sup>

**Paid family leave improves outcomes for parents/caregivers and workers.** Paid leave is associated with health benefits for new mothers, including declines in postpartum depression.<sup>5</sup> By reducing risk factors like parental stress and depression, paid leave may also help prevent child maltreatment.<sup>6</sup> Families using Rhode Island's state paid leave program reported better health, lower stress, and a higher satisfaction in their ability to care for their new children and to arrange for child care.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that Maine has a significant gap in the availability of child care for infants. The difficulty in finding infant care could be eased by parents having the opportunity to extend the length of their time home with their babies.

Implementing Paid Family and Medical Leave will help attract and retain young families to live and work in Maine. It will make critical investments in the nurturing and care of Maine's youngest children now, which will benefit all of us in the long-term health and economic success of our state. Now is the time. I urge your support of LD 1964.

Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> [children-benefit-when-parents.pdf \(nationalpartnership.org\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [The impact of paid family leave in the United States on birth outcomes and mortality in the first year of life - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Family Leave after Childbirth and the Health of New Mothers | NBER](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Identifying the Effectiveness of Policies That May Prevent Child Maltreatment Among Infants and Toddlers - Child Trends -- ChildTrends](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Launching the Rhode Island Temporary Caregiver Insurance Program \(TCI\): Employee Experiences One Year Later -- Social Science Institute for Research, Education, and Policy \(uri.edu\)](#)