

**Testimony of Regina Rooney in support of LD 1964: An Act to Implement the
Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and
Medical Leave Benefits Program**

May 25, 2023

Hello Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Regina Rooney, I live in Hope, and I am here as an individual to ask you to please vote “ought to pass” on LD 1964.

My mother died of lung disease in February. In the four months before her death, I moved in to care for her. I am incredibly fortunate to work for the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence, an organization with strong leave policies. When Mom went on hospice, I was allowed first to use up my bank of paid time off, and then to access 12 additional weeks of leave at 2/3 my salary.

That paid time has meant everything.

Mom wanted to remain at home until she died, in the house my husband and I purchased when she moved to Maine to be near us and our support. Even had she wanted to live elsewhere, the pathways to the kind of state assistance she’d have needed to move to a facility were circuitous and too lengthy to be practical given her life expectancy. Moving her into our small home, with the one bathroom upstairs, wouldn’t work. And we certainly could not afford the cost of round-the-clock private care.

In short: our options were limited, even with all the privileges of a middle class, dual-income household with no children. Helping Mom to stay at home was the only real choice – and yet, without two incomes, we couldn’t have afforded to pay two mortgages. Paid leave was what made it possible.

I know many people care for their loved ones while working full time and then some, and I cannot fathom the cruelty of that. I try to imagine what it would have looked like to try to facilitate a Zoom meeting or co-train a group of professionals online, while at the same time helping my unsteady mom to the bathroom, coordinating visits from the hospice providers, trying to come up with foods that would tempt her waning appetite, and monitoring her in order to administer the array of intensive medications she needed to manage her pain and shortness of breath, and I just can’t. I could not have been a good employee *and* do that caregiving work, anymore than I could have been the caregiver Mom needed while trying to do my professional job. Trying to do both would have wrecked me. Paid leave saved my mental health.

I remember the hospice social worker telling me, “You know, many people don’t have someone who can stay with them. We do our best to cobble it together and check on them, but many are at home alone most of the time.” Sick people deserve better than that, and so do the people who care for them, and so do the workplaces who employ those people. That scenario is lose-lose for everyone.

Paid leave allowed me to care for my mother at the end of her life, quite literally allowing us to keep a roof over her head. After she passed, my work allowed me to use the remainder of my approved leave, recognizing that even though I was no longer caring for Mom, I had some work to do to care for myself before I could rejoin our team.

I will forever be grateful to my workplace for these many gifts. However, this kind of leave should not be a privilege that depends on the benevolence of individual employers. It should be accessible to all of us. For these reasons, I ask you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 1964.