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Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Evan LeBrun. I'm the executive director of Mainers for Working Families, an organization that promotes solutions that help working families and small businesses thrive in Maine. On behalf of the communities we advocate for, I urge you to pass LD 1964: An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.

We've been talking with Mainers across the state about paid family and medical leave for over three years now. In all of those conversations, we keep hearing the same thing: Mainers can't afford to wait any longer to have the protections they need to care for themselves and the people they love.

We've spoken to new parents, like Samantha from Augusta who told us it was "heartbreaking" to return to work right after giving birth, but her family couldn't afford for her to miss a paycheck.

We've spoken to Mainers who needed care from their families. Like Kelly from Milford whose husband nearly lost his job in order to take the time he needed to care for his wife after a botched surgery left her extremely unwell. "We almost lost everything, because of me," Kelly told us.

We've spoken to caregivers, like Abby from Bath who, along with her husband, struggled to balance work and caring for their disabled son. In Abby's words when "parents and caregivers find themselves in a place where they have to choose between a job and taking care of their children, it's a crisis situation."

We've spoken to doctors, like Shannon from Bristol, who works with women and families and who told us that "every day" she sees the impact that the absence of comprehensive paid family and medical leave has on her patients. Shannon's not the only doctor with this experience. That's why 175 medical professionals in Maine signed on to our petition supporting this policy.

We've spoken to small business owners, like Ronald from Patten who told us his support for paid family and medical leave was reinforced when one of his employees took time off to care for her seriously ill mother. After getting that care from her daughter, the employee's mother recovered and spent many more years with her family.

Many of the people we've spoken to who were lucky enough to have access to paid family and medical leave when they needed it have told us they don't know what they would have done without it. But in every corner of the state, you can find folks who have been forced to make that agonizing choice of either taking care of themselves or their families or keeping their job, putting food on the table, paying their rent.

By passing LD 1964, you can make sure that no Mainer has to make that choice again. By doing so, you would be joining 13 other states in the country, including every other state in New England, who have already passed paid family and medical leave programs.

To those worried about the cost of this program or a rush of employees suddenly leaving work all at once when they get access to this benefit, consider that even though most people will have a time in their life where they need this policy, a poll Mainers for Working Families conducted last month found that only 5% of Mainers would anticipate needing to use paid family and medical leave within the next year. Only 18% believe they would use it within the next five years.

We can and we must enact this critical policy, because no matter what job you have, or how much money you make, when the people you love need you, you deserve to be there.