

Chloe Cekada
Portland, Maine
April 21, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Honorable Members of the Labor Committee,

My name is Chloe Cekada. I'm a resident of Portland, Maine, and I'm here today to urge you to vote "*Ought Not to Pass*" on the bills before this committee that would undermine Paid Family and Medical Leave in our state.

I come to you not only as a citizen, but as someone who has experienced firsthand how vital this kind of program can be—and what it means to families during their most vulnerable moments.

Five years ago, I was working in social services at a local health clinic. It was a job I loved, serving a community I was deeply committed to. At the same time, my mother was three years into her battle with breast cancer, which had metastasized to her liver. She lived in West Bath with her partner, who, due to his age, needed support himself to care for her.

My sister and I did everything we could. She worked in the food service industry in Portland, and we shared a car—so I often took the bus to Brunswick after work, and from there, we commuted together to care for our mother. We juggled our jobs, financial responsibilities, and the demands of caregiving through long Maine winters, determined to spend as much meaningful time as possible with her.

When my mother's condition worsened and we transitioned to palliative care at home, the strain intensified. I had used up all of my paid time off—about six weeks of vacation—just to be present for chemo appointments and urgent care needs. Eventually, I enrolled in Family and Medical Leave through my employer, taking unpaid days off as much as was financially possible.

A week before she passed, I left work and realized I wouldn't be going back until after she was gone. While I was fortunate to have an understanding employer, I was completely overwhelmed—emotionally, physically, and financially. There were no systems in place to truly support me or my family through this time. I was grieving and exhausted, and only now, years later, can I fully grasp the toll that experience took on me.

After my mother died, I returned to work with no remaining paid time off and no financial cushion. I eventually burned out of the field I loved—working with unhoused community members—because the emotional and financial cost of being a full-time caregiver and full-time worker had left me depleted.

Looking back, I often wonder how different things might have been if I'd had access to paid family medical leave—real, dignified support that recognized caregiving as the essential work

that it is. I wonder how my grief and healing process might have changed if I'd had the space and resources to truly care for my mom, and for myself.

We need this program in Maine. And not just for people like me. For those with even fewer social or financial safety nets—who are navigating caregiving, illness, disability, and loss alone—this program can make the difference between survival and crisis. Caregivers and families deserve dignity and support, especially in life's most fragile moments.

Eliminating or weakening Paid Family and Medical Leave would rob Mainers of that dignity. It would worsen the insecurity and instability that already come with caring for a loved one without proper structural support.

Thank you for your time and engagement on this deeply personal and important issue. I urge you to preserve this program—and give it the chance to support the lives it was designed to reach.

Please vote “Ought Not to Pass” on these bills.

Sincerely,
Chloe Cekada