

Good afternoon, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Honorable Members of the Labor Committee. My name is Janel Crowley, I'm a resident of Gray, Maine and have been a registered nurse for 15 years. I am a member of Maine State Nurses Association and the Chief Steward at MaineHealth Maine Medical Center Portland where I work in the NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit). I am here in opposition of the bills before the committee today.

I support Maine's Paid Family and Medical Leave program, with no carve outs, benefits reductions, or delays, because paid leave lets workers take time off in times when they really need it, like to heal from serious medical conditions, to care for a new baby, adopted child, or seriously ill family member, or to escape domestic violence.

As I mentioned I work in the NICU. Every day I watch families make the decision to return to work early after having a premature or critically ill baby so they can save their paid time off and protected leave for when their child is discharged from the hospital. That means mothers who have recently given birth are returning to work within a week or two of delivery when they are at high risk of post-partum complication despite the advice of their medical care team because they have no other option. The struggle these parents go through is heartbreaking, because while they're trying to protect their income and job, all the members of our NICU care team are telling them that the best thing they can do for their baby is to be at their bedside and holding them as much as possible. It's unethical and immoral for us to be asking a parent at such an emotional point in their life to decide between financial and job security and caring for and bonding with their newborn infant who's struggling to survive.

Paid leave also lets nurses care for ourselves and our families and stay in the workforce to care for your families too. I have had to go out on leave multiple times throughout my career because I have a (now adult) son with Cystic Fibrosis. When he was little, he had extended hospital stays on a regular basis. My husband and I would make the difficult decision for me to take a leave to help care for him. Often, I would use my saved PTO so I would still get paid while on leave, but that meant I had to give up taking any real time off from being a nurse and caregiver. I've had several co-workers and friends who have gone through similar struggles, and who've made the decision to leave their nursing career to care for themselves or their loved ones; this has a huge negative impact on a nursing workforce that is already being pushed to and beyond its limits every day.

Finally, slashing benefits and giving employers the right to deny leave whenever they claim hardship denies access to paid leave to Mainers who need it. My husband and I had to file for bankruptcy and lost our home due to the many unpaid leaves I took in the first year of my son's life. Many other Mainers are in similar situations and are just one missed paycheck away from being unhoused. Keeping Paid Family and Medical Leave in place will help prevent that; we just need to give the program the time it needs to work in the way that similar programs across the United States and around the world have proven themselves to work.

Thank you for your time.