

Amy Jane Larkin
Arundel

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and honorable members of the Labor Committee: my name is Amy Larkin, I am a resident of Arundel and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 575 and in opposition to LDs 406, 539, 952, 1169, 1221, 1249, 1273, 1307, 1333, 1400, and 1712.

I am one of Maine's many family caregivers. My grandmother Eva, who is now 102, lived on her own for a few years after my mother died, and my husband and I moved in to help care for her after she had a minor stroke during a very snowy winter 7 years ago. We are grateful to have shared this time together, but illnesses and injuries regularly pop up that mean I can't work.

After a long day of celebrating her 100th birthday, Eva tried taking her shoes off, lost her balance, fell, and broke her hip. She had surgery and was transferred to a rehab hospital in Portland. Because she's such an active woman, her acute rehab stay lasted only 11 days before she returned to us. Her first three weeks back at home were particularly tough because she was in a lot of pain and needed help doing things like getting dressed, getting in and out of bed, bathing, using the bathroom, prepping every meal, taking all her medications including a few new ones, and preparing and applying ice packs.

After a month or so, I considered myself fortunate that she needed me for only 6-8 hours per day including running errands and getting her to appointments. I work for myself as an illustrator and because I'm self-employed I didn't need permission to take time off. But I lost two months of income and was turning down jobs. I feared losing clients and I worried constantly. My mental health and my ability to focus when I could work suffered.

I am here today because I know that everyone will have an experience like mine at some point in their life. Each of us will need to take time off work to care for ourselves or someone we love. And when we do so, we should not be afraid. We should be able to focus on our grandmothers, our new babies, our spouses, our parents, our siblings and ourselves.

Hardship comes for all of us equally and one of these bills, LD 1712, would make it more difficult for low-wage workers to access PFML by creating a flat rate for wage replacement. We know that in states with low reimbursement rates, low-wage workers generally can't afford to take leave. This is one of many unnecessary changes that saves businesses very little money but means that PFML here in Maine wouldn't be accessible to the people who need it most. Years of effort have been put into developing a strong PFML system, and it's time to let it work for caregivers like me and all our neighbors. I strongly urge you to vote "Ought not to pass" on LD 1712 and other bills that undermine this vital program. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today and for listening.