

LEAH DERAGON
Birth Roots, Portland
LD 406

Leah Deragon
Portland, Maine

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

Thank you for this opportunity to submit my testimony. My name is Leah Deragon, I am a resident of Portland, and I am writing today in opposition of LD406 (as well as LD539 | LD952 | LD 1169 | LD1221 | LD1249 | LD1273 | LD1307 | LD1333 | LD1400 and LD 1712)

As a seasoned childbirth educator, retired doula, and nonprofit founder spanning more than two decades, I am uniquely positioned to testify with the moral authority of a veteran advocate for the local perinatal systems of care impacting the health and wellbeing of newborns and new parents. I bring extensive subject matter expertise on our nation's legacy of decades of legislative indifference to expectant and brand new parents.

Between 2000 to 2010 I supported nearly 200 families in Southern Maine and beyond as a birth and postpartum doula. In addition to devoting a decade of direct service in the delivery room, I continue to this day to support perinatal families in my role as a childbirth and postnatal educator and as co-founder/ Director of Mission and Impact for Birth Roots, with more than 7,000 program alumni families locally.

The United States places far more demands on the nuclear family and asks far more of new parents than any of our peer nations. The 2019 UNICEF study titled, "Are the World's Richest Countries Family Friendly?" found that America ranks last, 41 among all 41 countries evaluated for family-friendly policies. Specifically, the load that mothers carry is just too heavy. Unlike the wealthiest 40 nations in the world, U.S. lawmakers have spent more than 4 decades blocking caregiving infrastructure and structural support for parents.

Zero Parental Leave in the US is not an oversight or a blindspot. In 2021, 12 weeks of Leave was removed from the language in the Build Back Better bill put before Congress and replaced with an anemic 4 weeks, and the answer was still a dismissive NO. No, we will not legislate 4 protected weeks of Paid Leave to invest in the health of America's mothers or America's newborns.

When Congress was once again given an opportunity, our Representatives voted to do literally nothing about the uniquely American statistic of 25% (*1 in 4) postpartum mothers returning to work within 10 days, DAYS, of giving birth.

*1 in 4 American mothers return to jobs while they are still very much bleeding - because postnatal bleeding lasts for 40 days, not 10 days.

*1 in 4 American newborns must be left with an alternate caregiver before a licensed childcare center can legally accept a newborn at 6 weeks of age. Is anyone even asking the question, Where are the 25% of newborn babies who are, by law, too young for childcare centers to receive them?

"Prior to the pandemic, there was a nationwide ratio of more than 2 children for every one childcare slot. Today that number is closer to 4 children for every slot." Let the records show that 6 to 9 months of National Family Leave would alleviate this considerably, but here we are - getting pushback about 3.

US tax dollars are allocated elsewhere while, in at least 40 peer nations, for at least 40 years, no individual parent or family is forced to be a child's entire nation. America's parents, Maine's parents, are stretched beyond capacity compensating for a nation's negligence and indifference.

I speak from experience when I say that parenting without a safetynet is a recipe for paralyzing anxiety and debilitating burnout. DIY Infrastructure + BYO Safetynet is at

the root of our staggering Mental Health Crisis. This conversation needs a new starting point, a new premise, because it takes more than a village to raise a healthy child, indeed, it requires a nation with the political will to ensure there's a floor under every primary caregiver.

Paid family leave in our time, affordable childcare in our time. Pass Paid Leave.

Vote No on LD406, ought not to pass