

Star Pelsue
PORTLAND
LD 1712

Testimony in Opposition to LD 1712: An Act to Amend the Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program to Balance Support of Businesses and Employees

Submitted by Star Pelsue

April 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Labor and Housing Committee,

My name is Star Pelsue, and I am writing today not just as a community member, but as someone who has stepped away from work—more than once—to care for loved ones. I did so first for a parent, and later for a sibling. These were not decisions made lightly, but I made them willingly. I would do it again in a heartbeat, because family comes first.

But taking that leave came at a cost. Each time, I felt the impact on my day-to-day budget and my long-term financial security. My Social Security contributions were affected, and with every unpaid week, I had to stretch to make ends meet. And I am not alone. There are so many Mainers—quietly and faithfully—caring for the people they love, often at great personal sacrifice.

That's why I'm deeply concerned about LD 1712.

This bill takes a program that is supposed to offer dignity and support during life's hardest moments and chips away at its foundation. Section 1 allows businesses to claim "hardship" exemptions that could prevent workers from accessing benefits they've paid into—without any right to appeal. That means people like me, and many others who care for family, could be denied access to the help they earned, right when they need it most.

As a volunteer at the Ronald McDonald House, I see the emotional toll families face when their children are in the hospital. These families are stretched thin, worried not only about their child's health but also about how they'll pay the bills or whether they'll have a job to return to. Adding more barriers to paid leave only increases that suffering.

Section 4 of this bill is especially troubling. Cutting the wage replacement rate down to 65% may sound like a small change on paper, but for low-income Mainers, it could mean the difference between being able to take leave—or being forced to keep working through crisis. The current law, with its higher reimbursement for the first tier of income, is what makes leave accessible for those who live paycheck to paycheck.

Section 2 undermines the ability of unions to bargain for their fair share, which weakens worker protections. And Section 8, by reducing penalties for employer noncompliance, could open the door to misuse and neglect—putting the program's financial integrity and workers' access at risk.

This is not how we support Maine families. Paid Family and Medical Leave is not a luxury. It's a lifeline. We should be looking for ways to strengthen the program—not making it harder for people to use. I've seen firsthand the burden that caregiving places on individuals and families. Every bit of support matters.

I urge you to oppose LD 1712. Let's keep the promises we made to Maine's workers and families. Let's protect their right to care and to be cared for.

Thank you for your time and for your service.

Sincerely,
Star Pelsue
Greater Portland, Maine