

April 23, 2025

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

I strongly support the Paid Family and Medical Leave program Maine is establishing and ask you to allow the extraordinarily hard work put into creating compromises that work for Maine businesses and Maine workers to be implemented before we begin tinkering at the statutory level. This set of repeal bills simply adds layers of work to program development that is in progress, and undermines the clear will of Maine people to offer a humane and responsible Paid Leave Program for all of us.

I am writing this testimony while experiencing my own recovery from a medical procedure. I do not have access to paid family leave, as a contingent faculty member with the University of Maine system, and thus had to take unpaid leave / quit my job to access health care. I am extremely lucky that I could afford to do so, but still mourn the loss of my professional role, for a 2-6 week recovery period. I think daily of all the people who cannot afford this time, and either would forgo needed health care, put their recovery at risk by returning to work too quickly, or would be experiencing a financial emergency right now. Why do we want to create so much pain, anxiety and cruelty within our communities? Our bodies ALL need time to access medical care and recover at some point over our very long working lives. No one is immune from experiencing a health emergency over their lifetime. That we institutionalize the expansion of inequality, penalizing low wage workers who are so much less likely to have access to paid leave, and less likely to live in families with independent means, is just horrible. In 2023, Maine people agreed with this, fueling the passage of the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act. We are desperately waiting for implementation, and frustrated to be "relitigating" during a season where we are all extremely busy, working, living, caring for others.

I considered submitting my testimony from prior hearings, but I do not think at this point the debate is about if Paid Leave is needed. There just is so much clarity about the need. The issue is if the need for PFML by Maine's smaller business, nonprofits, and workers can compete with the need of businesses that wish for a predictable and affordable workforce and do not want to accommodate the inconvenience of personnel needs. The issue is if the needs of Maine caregivers can compete with the desire of big business, like BIW, to maximize their own profits and high pay for top management by refusing to participate in a social insurance program.

I desperately hope that the Legislature can recognize - even with empathy - that the squeeze on small business is real, and that most business owners and nonprofit boards WANT to support workers, that this program will ultimately benefit these businesses the most. The challenge of navigating a short term leave for an employee can be genuinely hard, but asking people to simply ignore their health needs or family obligations does not fix this problem, and ultimately just leads to high rates of turnover. Maine's small businesses might need additional support and that should be provided through appropriate different expenditures, not through dismantling Paid

Leave. I have less empathy for the complaints of the Chamber and big business that simply see workers as easily replaceable and don't want to participate in anything collective. We are a society, and we pay a lot to maintain the infrastructure within which these businesses thrive, and they should be willing to help improve their communities. BIW, in particular, relies on taxes to fund their program. It is bewildering that they feel free to exempt themselves from creating a healthy community and sharing responsibility for those outside of their immediate workforce, while asking the rest of us to willingly invest in them without a choice.

Ultimately, these bills are taking time we genuinely need to be spending on the urgent problems facing our bodies, families and communities this April School vacation week. We need to get PFML up and running and have a process for iterative improvements, but should not entertain these threats at the Legislative level.

Thank you,

Kimberly Simmons, Ph.D.