

## **Testimony of Andrea Berry**

**In support of**

**LD 1559: Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.**

**May 7th, 2021**

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and esteemed members of the Labor and Housing Committee. My name is Andrea Berry and I am submitting testimony in support of **LD 1559: Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.**

In 2009 when I found myself laid off from my job at 8 months pregnant, a state-run family leave program would have come to the rescue. Officially, the organization I worked for was downsizing. In reality, I was the only one who lost their job. My boss casually mentioned that if I'd be willing to forego any paid leave that he would consider reinstating me. I just had to understand that they couldn't afford to pay me while out for my maternity leave- they had no choice. If I had access to paid family and medical leave, I would not have lost my job. But, there are a number of similar maternity leave stories like mine, as they are all too common.

Instead, I'd like to focus on December 2015, when I, at the age of 35, suffered a mild stroke—nothing I could have planned for. I was employed at the time by a small organization with no medical leave program that was too small to qualify for FMLA. My colleagues tried to work with me at first: I was able to take the remaining sick time I had accrued in 2015 and they fronted me five sick days to cover the first week of January. But that was the best they could do, so I lost my job. I started looking for work right away, despite severe vertigo, slurred speech, and loss of short term memory. I started a new job less than two months later, against my doctor's instructions.

My husband is a teacher and I was out of a job- this was a precarious situation. We looked to our savings. What was supposed to be the beginnings of a retirement nest egg went to pay our mortgage and doctors bills. Honestly, we were pretty lucky to have the money—I have since supported other families with Go Fund Me donations to help them through similar times, to pay forward our "good fortune". It is depressing how many people have stories just like mine.

Illness is hard enough. The accompanying financial implications exacerbate the stress, uncertainty, and fear and make us make rash decisions that have long term implications.

A paid family leave program in place for Maine will offer a safety net for middle class families like mine, and for all Mainers, no matter their economic status. No one should have to deplete their retirement funds or create a Go Fund Me campaign to cover maternity leave, or time off work due to illness, or to care for sick family members. People in our state deserve a paid family and medical leave system that is built by and for Mainers, and the commission created by LD 1559 is an important first step. I am urging you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1559.