



Testimony in support of LD 1559

Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Nicole Clegg and I serve as the Senior Vice President of Public Affairs at Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and I am pleased to submit testimony in support of LD 1559.

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care to more than 14,000 people in Maine at four health centers located in Biddeford, Portland, Sanford and Topsham. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, disease testing and treatment, cancer screenings, abortion care as well as a variety of primary care services. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of ability to pay, and in a typical year, we provide more than \$4 million in free and discounted care to our communities in Maine.

As a mission driven health care provider, we fundamentally believe everyone should be able to get affordable, high quality sexual and reproductive health care in their communities, no matter where they live or how much money they make and we advocate for policies that help make this vision a reality.

It is this desire to improve the lives of our patients and the health of the community that leads us to support LD 1559 today. Nearly 70% of our patients are struggling financially, living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level and the majority, 86%, are women. We hear about their struggles to take care of their health and their families, which is why policies like paid family medical Leave are so important for attaining economic security.

Beyond all else, paid family medical leave is an equity issue-- the lack of which falls most heavily on frontline workers, who are disproportionately made up of already key populations. Women account for more than two thirds of all of Maine's frontline workers; a similar disparity in the distribution of labor exists along racial lines as well, while Black workers are only 1.3% of the workforce in Maine, they are 31% more likely than white workers to be on the frontlines. Given these facts, especially when coupled with the reality that women are more likely than men to leave the workforce due to essential caregiving responsibilities, this bill's goal to enable the implementation of a system of paid family and medical leave for Maine is an important step in the fight for gender and racial equity in our state.

The facts around paid leave as it currently exists in the United States are stark: only 15% of American workers have access to any sort of paid leave. Fewer than 60% of the workforce has access to unpaid leave under the Family Medical Leave Act-- and even

among those covered by the FMLA, many don't take leave, because they can't afford unpaid time off work. The lack of access to paid leave leads to disruption in the workforce, negative public health outcomes, and struggling families, communities, and employers.

As with so many issues examined by this body over the past few months, the costs imposed by the lack of universal paid family and medical leave have only been exacerbated by the recent pandemic. COVID-19 has led to unprecedented levels of job loss. When employees must quarantine or care for young children or aging adults because schools and daycares have closed or made elder care more difficult to access, everyone struggles. Paid leave will help the workers and families of this state deal with the numerous challenges posed by the pandemic and still likely to be faced during the recovery without risking unemployment or financial insecurity.

The benefits of paid leave are myriad with positive impacts seen at all stages in life. For new parents it means more time to bond, increased breastfeeding success, increased likelihood of early childhood immunizations and check-ups and ultimately an increased likelihood of both parents returning to work. While for the aging-- especially important given our state's population make-up-- paid leave can mean that people have the time to take care of their own health or the time to help provide care for friends or family members in need of assistance.

Though LD 1559 would not immediately implement paid family and medical leave, it would establish a framework to allow working Mainers, businesses, and experts to come together with state government to chart a course for implementing a system of paid family and medical leave that works for all of us. Now is the time to take this step, which is why I strongly urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1559.