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Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier in support of
LD 1559, Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, I am Kristen Cloutier and I proudly represent House District 60, part of my hometown of Lewiston, in the Maine State Legislature. I also served as a primary caregiver for over a year as the daughter of someone diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. I am here today to testify in support of **LD 1559, Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.**

In 2012, my mother was living alone in Ocala, Florida. Her family was here in Maine. We visited with each other at least twice a year, her coming to Maine for Christmas and her children traveling to Florida to celebrate the arrival of spring. While things with my mother began to appear "off" over the course of some of those visits, it never occurred to any of her three children that she could have Alzheimer's. She was only entering her early 70s, and had spent her entire life in great health. It wasn't long after her initial diagnosis from her PCP that we had moved her back to Maine and set her up with the Memory Care Team at St. Mary's Regional Medical Center. Over the course of the next six years, the disease progressed quickly and aggressively, stripping away the parts of my mother that made her who she was. She passed away on April 20, 2018.

When she first arrived in Maine, while we were fortunate to have access to excellent medical care, we did not have access to living conditions that fit my mother's stage of the disease. Because she was considered to have "moderate" Alzheimer's, it was difficult to find a place for her. She did not require the level of care that was available through the locked memory care facilities close to our home, yet she did require someone to be with her 24 hours a day. This care ended up falling to my husband and me, who both needed to also work full-time to keep our household and family afloat financially. Mom went to "adult daycare" in Topsham while we were at work, and we split the duties of taking care of her in the evenings and on weekends, juggling schedules to manage a 10-year old daughter, two dogs, and our community responsibilities as well. I was blessed to have had this time with my mother and I would not change our decision to take her into our home. I only wish that we had been able to take some

time away from our jobs to do it. I have no doubt that our time together would have been less stressful and more meaningful for all of us. Eventually, as my mother moved into the final stages of the disease, and our own self-care and relationships began to suffer, we were forced to place my mother into a facility. It was one of the hardest decisions I have ever had to make, and I will probably second guess it for the rest of my life, because I know that her happiness and in turn, her health, declined from that point on.

LD 1559 will create a commission to develop a paid family and medical leave benefits program. Such a program would have made it possible for both my husband and I, and so many others within our state, to take leave without having to choose between providing for our family and taking time away from our jobs to care for my mother.

We grieved the three-year anniversary of my mother's passing last month, and I honor her memory by sharing this story with you. I hope that you will also honor her memory by supporting LD 1559, and by giving families like ours an opportunity to focus on the things that truly matter in life without the worry of how they will also make ends meet.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions.