

Rhiannon Guzelian
Gorham

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Labor and Housing, good morning.

My name is Rhiannon Guzelian, and I am a veteran from Gorham, Maine. I'm testifying in support of LD 1559, "Resolve to Create a Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program."

Since leaving the military in 2014, I've worked closely with my fellow veterans, spending three years helping them find meaningful employment and another three years sharing veterans' stories. In that time, I've met too many hardworking, resourceful veterans experiencing homelessness following an illness or injury that impacted their ability to work -- folks that could have been protected by paid family and medical leave.

I know first-hand what it's like to need time off from work due to illness. After my military service, I was diagnosed with anxiety, PTSD from non-combat trauma, and depression. Even with treatment, I struggled, and I eventually burned out.

Amid a mental health crisis, I took medical leave from my job to attend an intensive treatment program. Ultimately, I decided to leave that job for one that offered more work-life balance. But three months into my new job, I hit a wall again. This time, it was even more serious. I again took medical leave from work. Fortunately, I was eligible for temporary disability benefits while I pursued treatment.

Having time to heal, access to good healthcare, and the ability to pay my bills saved my life. If you can get through your career without a serious illness, injury, or becoming the caregiver for a family member, you're incredibly lucky. Without paid family and medical leave, people deal with these challenges at the expense of their health, their family's financial well-being, or both.

That's why I'm urging you to pass LD 1559. Paid family and medical leave will allow hardworking Mainers, including veterans and parents, to take time for their health and well-being without fear of losing a job or vital income.

Thank you for your time.