

Aranka Matolcsy
South Paris

Senator Craig Hickman, Representative Mike Sylvester, and distinguished members of the Committee on Labor and Housing:

My name is Aranka Matolcsy. I am from South Paris, Maine and I am here to be a voice for thousands of Maine families who are struggling with the realities of being a working parent and caregiver without having access to Paid Family & Medical Leave. I am writing to ask for your support of LD 1559: To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program; Sponsored by Senator Mattie Daughtry.

I'm a single mom to my son, Colby, who was born with a serious genetic condition. I didn't know Colby was going to have Down syndrome, but I'd change nothing. I will fight to the death to save his life and give him the support he needs to thrive.

My ability to work and be hired with any regularity has ended due to the tremendous amount of medical and special needs of my child. I can't find work that is flexible enough to bend around 35+ missed days between September and June, with little to no daycare options because Colby is required to have one-on-one support in order to be safe to attend, and we have no one.

My son and I now live under the federal poverty line. Our lives have been driven into food insecurity, fear of foreclosure, isolation, and hopelessness. We were even denied subsidized child care for the first two years. You read that right: a single mom of a child with Down syndrome was denied help with child care. Our social safety nets have let us down.

There are many families just like mine who are forced to fight for support. We are relegated to social services even though most of us, given the option, want to work. I would give anything to go back to fully supporting myself as I always have, but that will never happen if I am to meet my child's needs and ensure that he will have a productive and fulfilled future. Not without the programs in place that are necessary for families like mine to survive, which is why I am supporting LD 1559.

Having access to a statewide Paid Family & Medical Leave policy would provide much-needed relief for my family, and countless others. If I had the ability to take the time off I needed to care for Colby when yet another Behavioral Health Professional falls through, or when we have medical appointments, I could retain employment and support my son. I wouldn't fear losing my home. I wouldn't have to worry about how I'll afford to put food on the table or pay for gas. Maybe I'd even be able to start saving for my son's future.

I know that my family's story, while seemingly extreme, is not unique. Countless Maine families are put into these impossible situations, forced to give up work or even a paycheck just to care for their child, or parent, or sibling. Unpaid family leave is not sustainable in the world we live in. And nearly every other developed country has a paid family leave program. Why not us?

I implore you to support this critical piece of legislation.