



**Written Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of
The Maine Council on Aging
To Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing**

**In Favor of LD 1557 – Resolve, To Create the Commission to
Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program**

Testimony Provided in Writing on May 7, 2021

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing:

My name is Jess Maurer and I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of more than 100 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am writing in support of LD 1557.

We are in support of Paid Family & Medical Leave for several reasons. Paid Family & Medical Leave is good for older adults, for people who care for older adults, for organizations and agencies that provide care for older adults, and for families throughout Maine.

We recognize the value of paid medical and family leave. It enables everyone who is working, including older adults, to take care of themselves and their families.

Every day in Maine tens of thousands of working Mainers get up early to provide care to their spouses or parents, and sometimes both, who can no longer fully care for themselves. They put in a full day's work and return home to continue the care. They take vacation time to get their loved ones to doctor's appointments and spend weekends creating plans of care to meet increased needs, filling prescriptions, preparing meals and taking care of all that did not get done during the week. They do this all with no fanfare and often with little or no support.

There are an estimated 178,000 informal family caregivers in Maine. These are spouses, children, grandchildren and other relatives caring for older people who have difficulty living independently. Many of these caregivers are caring for the more than 37,000 people in Maine who are living with some form of dementia.

Supporting family caregivers is one of our top priorities and with good reason. Informal family caregivers are the backbone of our long-term supports and services system – without them, our system of caring for older adults would collapse. This is because it's estimated that Maine would

have to spend \$2.6 billion annually to provide the same level of care. The care they provide reduces needed home care hours, keeps people healthy and out of hospitals and delays entry into assisted living and nursing home care. This remarkable collective contribution is fueled by our shared value that we take care of our own.

Being a caregiver is a full time job for many. Unfortunately, this is a serious conflict as 48% of caregivers are 18-49 years old. These caregivers are very much still a part of our declining workforce and must juggle their primary, full time job with their caregiving responsibilities, along with the responsibilities they have in the other roles they fill. According to a 2016 National Study of Caregiving, more than half of family caregivers to older adults are employed part or full time, with caregivers of parents employed at a rate of 60%. This is consistent with informal studies of caregivers in Maine.

Many caregivers do not have paid time off. For them, taking unpaid leave may create a serious hardship, leaving the worker with no income to meet their financial obligations while they try to provide care for a parent with dementia who has a broken hip or is being treated for cancer. According to a 2015 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics study of workers without employer-paid leave, 44% of workers who are in the lowest 25% of wage earners do not have access to employer-paid leave and 56% of part-time workers don't have access to employer-paid leave. Far too many workers faced with this situation decide to leave their jobs, creating instability in the life of the worker and for the employer.

We want to encourage family members to take responsibility for caring for older relatives who can no longer live independently. We also want to make sure that Maine's working caregivers remain active in our shrinking workforce. Workers need to know that they can take the time they need to responsibly deal with a serious health condition of a loved one without jeopardizing their jobs or plunging themselves into a financial worry.

Another equally important reason we support LD 1559 is its impact on the care provided to older adults who need essential care services. MCOA has provided testimony on multiple other bills before this Committee outlining the severe, pervasive, and growing shortage of essential care workers in Maine. The challenge of retaining workers is a significant component of this shortage. For some essential care workers, the need to take time to care for themselves or their family members means they have to leave their job. Paid family and medical leave can help these critical workers stay in the workforce and providing essential care for those who need it. We need every one of these workers and more to meet the growing need.

Finally, by creating a Commission to develop a thoughtful and well-considered plan for the paid family and medical leave benefits program, this important initiative can be carefully tailored and smoothly implemented to meet the specific needs of Maine.

We urge you to vote in favor of LD 1559. Thank you.