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**May 7, 2021**

**Testimony of Representative Genevieve McDonald  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing  
Cosponsor in FAVOR of L.D. 1559**

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

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, I am Representative Genevieve McDonald of House District 134 and I am testifying before you today as a cosponsor in favor of **L.D. 1559, Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.**

They say you are never fully prepared to welcome a child into the world. I know this to be true, because I have tried. When my husband and I found out we were expecting we were overjoyed. In preparation we went to the best doctors, painted the nursery, read all the books, and set aside my husband's two weeks paid vacation thinking we would spend that time together bonding as a new family. We were ready. Until I went into labor six weeks early.

In April of 2018 we welcomed our two beautiful daughters into the world. Upon their arrival, they were admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and our vision of being discharged as a family was shattered and replaced by countless hours spent sitting by their incubators, listening to the sound of heart monitors. We were fortunate our children were never critical, but they needed to reach developmental milestones before they could be discharged. As the days dragged on we began to worry about what we would do when my husband's vacation time ran out. Due to the high-risk nature of my pregnancy, I had been out of work for some time and because I was self-employed did not have a safety net in the form of paid leave. With the addition of the travel

District 134 Cranberry Isles, Deer Isle, Frenchboro, Isle au Haut, North Haven, Southwest Harbor, Stonington, Swans Island, Tremont and Vinalhaven, plus the unorganized territory of Marshall Island Township

expenses we were incurring to be with our children at the NICU, we could not afford for him to take unpaid time off.

Our children were discharged on a Sunday, just in time for my husband to return to work before his vacation time ran out. Monday morning found me alone at home as a new mom, still recovering from a c-section, with two medically vulnerable infants. I still lament the loss of our opportunity to spend that time at home together, bonding with our children, welcoming visitors, and basking in the joy of new parenthood. If we'd had more than two weeks, we could have recaptured some of that experience. We won't get that time back, but other families still can. LD 1559 would find a path forward to help families like mine be better prepared.

The chance to bond with your children, care for a family member, or recover from an illness without the added stress of looming financial responsibilities is invaluable for everyone involved. Paid family and medical leave would allow parents facing medical uncertainties to concentrate on caring for their children, without having to worry about how they are going to pay their bills. The ripple effect would be far reaching, with more people staying in their jobs, fewer families on the brink of bankruptcy, and employers finding they have a happier, and more productive workforce. Workers shouldn't be punished for getting sick, having children, or helping to care for a loved one. If we, the Legislature, do this for Maine families, we can alter our trajectory for the better. I want Maine to be a state where work pays – both in terms of salaries, and quality of life.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to answer questions from the committee.