



*Senator Eloise Vitelli  
Senate Majority Leader  
3 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0003  
Office (207) 287-1515  
Home (207) 443-4660*

***Testimony of Sen. Eloise Vitelli supporting  
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  
May 7, 2021***

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and esteemed members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Eloise Vitelli, and I represent Senate District 23, which includes all of Sagadahoc County and the Town of Dresden in Lincoln County. I'm pleased to be here today to speak in support of LD 1559, "Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program."

As Maine recovers from the effects of the pandemic, we have the opportunity to take a serious look at what is working and what is not working in our society and our economy. We all know the pandemic exposed serious flaws in many of the systems that are supposed to support people through their most difficult times. This goes for health care, this goes for unemployment insurance, and this certainly goes for supporting working families.

With most children attending school from home, parents and caretakers who typically worked outside the home were faced with an untenable situation. Many had to leave work in order to do what was best for their families, especially those who didn't have the privilege of working remotely. This affected mothers, fathers, grandparents – whole family units were disrupted. However, more women – and particularly women of color – left the workforce than did men during this past year, and they have been slower to return.

This is in part because caretaking responsibilities disproportionately fall to women in our society. Looking ahead to life after the pandemic, we need find solutions that make the workforce a more equitable place for all workers, so that our economy can benefit from everyone's skills and talents. A paid leave program that allows workers to take time away from their jobs to care for a new baby or a sick loved one will help keep people connected to the workforce, instead of leaving altogether. Giving fathers and others the opportunity to do this caretaking will also take some of the burden off women and mothers, creating not only more equitable workplaces, but more equitable households.

Maine's aging population is another reason why implementing a paid family and medical leave policy is so critical. As we age, we are more likely to get sick, and with far too few Mainers prepared for retirement, most people will be working later in life than they would like. Giving workers the opportunity to care for themselves or their loved ones without being forced to leave

their jobs is compassionate and necessary policy. No one should have to choose between their health and putting food on the table, or heating their home. We need a strong and healthy workforce, and a paid leave policy can help us secure that.

We also need to attract young people to our state, and building a worker- and family-friendly environment will be crucial to that effort. The Maine Economic Development Strategy estimates that we will need to add an additional 75,000 people to our state's workforce by 2030. A work environment that sees you as a person, that allows you to take time when you have a child, or when you or a loved one is sick, is attractive to people deciding where to build a life.

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act is better than nothing, but it does not do nearly enough to support Mainers and Maine families. What I have outlined here are just a few of the reasons why we need paid family and medical leave in Maine. We know this is possible; many other states and countries have proven that to be true. Paid family and medical leave is overwhelmingly popular in Maine. It's time we begin to do the hard work of making a paid family and medical leave plan that works for the people of this state.

Thank you to Sen. Daughtry for introducing this bill, and to the committee for its consideration. I sincerely hope you will vote ought to pass.