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**LD 1559: Resolve, To Create the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program**

Greetings, Chairs Senator Hickman and Representative Sylvester, and members of the Joint Committee on Labor and Housing. My name is Pat Wehner, and I am an AARP Maine volunteer from Augusta. AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you today in support of LD 1559.

- In Maine, approximately 181,000 family caregivers provided an estimated 152 million hours of care — worth a staggering 2.2 billion dollars annually — to their parents, spouses, partners, and loved ones in 2017.
- Paid family and medical leave would provide family caregivers in Maine financial stability and job protection when they need it most: to be present for significant caregiving issues, during and after a hospitalization of a loved one, and in the last days of a loved one's life.
- Paid family and medical leave would also provide employees with the job stability and protection needed to deal with their own temporary or chronic health conditions.

Throughout my career, I was privileged to work for organizations who offered paid leave options to supplement the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which provides for only unpaid leave. Employees who know that they will be able to take time off when they are most needed – to care for a loved one in the event of illness or emergencies without the threat of losing a job or incurring financial hardship – feel valued and are generally more loyal. For employers, a well-defined paid leave policy provides the opportunity to work collaboratively with their associates in addressing the short-term absence, while in the long term retaining experienced and valued employees.

As a people manager, I found paid family and medical leave an effective tool to retain some of my top-performing associates:



- A single parent diagnosed with cancer was able to continue working, taking intermittent paid time off to undergo treatments with post-treatment recovery time. Having this support reduced the accompanying financial and emotional stress of dealing with not only medical bills but securing supplemental childcare.
- Another parent whose teenager was struggling with mental health issues was able to take the time off deal with hospital visits and to engage necessary counseling and support.
- Finally, for one employee, a planned brief (and routine), but joyous parental leave following the birth of a child turned into an extended paid family leave to deal with their newborn's unanticipated medical complications.

In each case, these high-performing employees returned, able to focus on their work and appreciative of the benefits that let them focus on themselves and their families when they most needed time to do so.

There are many ways to design and implement a paid family and medical leave program; at least ten other U.S. states have successfully done just that, funding the programs through either employee or employer contributions, or a combination. Supporting the health and financial stability of Maine workers and their families means a healthier and financially stronger Maine overall. Appointing a commission to study best practices and recommend a paid family and medical leave benefits program that meets the needs of Maine people is an important first step.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I respectfully ask you to vote in favor of LD 1559.

Pat Wehner  
Augusta