



Good morning. Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: my name is Adam Zuckerman, and I am the lobbyist for the Maine People's Alliance. Our 32,000 members stretch from Kittery to Fort Kent. We are committed to creating a state of Maine where everyone has what they need, everyone contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of Assistant Senate Majority Leader Daughtry's LD 1559, "Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program."

We are in the middle of a generation-defining pandemic. COVID-19 is causing the most harm to families whose jobs do not give them the flexibility to take any time away for a life event. Even without COVID, all workers will go through a time in their career when they have to care for a sick child, an elderly parent, partner, or themselves. Without paid family and medical leave, many Mainers can't afford the time or have the income to leave work — even when family has to come first. Mainers should never have to choose between their family responsibilities and their financial security or employment. This bill would study and identify the most effective paid family and medical leave system for our state. As we are looking to attract young families for our workforce, we need to be competitive with other states in New England like Connecticut and Massachusetts that have passed paid family medical leave. This bill is a crucial first step.

Crucially, paid family medical leave will help to narrow the gender wage gap. Even when they work full time, year-round, women in the United States are paid just 82 cents for every dollar paid to men. This gender wage gap is even much larger for women of color. The gender wage gap is even larger when measured over the long term because women are often pushed to spend time out of the workforce, in part due to unequal gender roles in family caregiving. That results in women being paid just 49 cents for each dollar paid to a man when measured over a 15 year period.^[1] Think about that; in the long-term women earn less than half of what men earn. When men like me have access to paid family medical leave, the women in our lives aren't forced to do all the caregiving.

And it's not just about caring for children. This bill is of critical importance to the "sandwich generation." For many Mainers caregiving needs for their parents start to ramp up often before they are done raising their kids. On average a woman who is 50 years or older who leaves the workforce early to care for an aging parent will lose more than \$324,000 in wages and

retirement.^[2] In a state with the oldest median population, more and more Maine families are facing that struggle.

Compared to other industrialized countries, the United States offers little support for working parents and family caregivers, particularly paid family and medical leave and affordable child care. This is a primary driver of U.S. women's relatively low labor force participation rate, which has actually declined since the 1990s. That costs our economy an estimated \$500 billion per year in reduced GDP.^[3]

Our state has a chance to do better. This bill will create a paid family and medical leave system built by and for Mainers. We can close the gender wage gap, improve our public health, bring families closer together, and truly create a state that represents what life should be. Thank you.