

Sara Leathers  
Eddington

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Sara Leathers, I am a resident of Eddington, and I am writing to testify in favor of LD 1711. When I was pregnant with my first child a few years ago, I worked at Five Guys Burgers & Fries in Bangor. I felt very sick during that pregnancy and when I was sick at work, my supervisors wouldn't let me leave. My growing family couldn't afford a loss of income and at that time Maine workers did not have the right to paid time off. Several things have changed since my terrible experience working at Five Guys. First, legislators like you delivered a victory for Maine's working families by passing a historic paid time off law that has now gone into effect. But at the same time, corporations like my former employer are burying forced arbitration provisions deep in the fine print of contracts that require workers to go through a closed door arbitration process, often paid out of pocket by the worker, and heavily weighted in favor of the corporation. I don't know if on my first day at work I signed a forced arbitration agreement in my stack of paperwork that I needed to sign in order to start earning money to support my family, but it's a matter of public record that Five Guys has required some (if not all) employees to sign arbitration agreements from 2013 on. Now if employees at Five Guys in Maine are denied the right to leave if they're sick at work like I was, they don't have access to their day in court. I'm relieved that according to the law on the books Maine workers like me have the right to paid time off, but we know this law and other hard-won labor protections are meaningless if they're not enforced. Every day, corporations like my former employer, violate the rights of their workers because they don't choose to spend resources on compliance when they know they are very unlikely to be held accountable.

That's why I'm writing to testify in favor of LD 1711. Sen. Jackson's bill would give Maine's DOL and the state Attorney General - which are not bound to the private arbitration agreements workers sign - greater reach to seek justice for Maine workers. I'm especially excited about the part of the bill where whistleblowers who fear retaliation can authorize a nonprofit to represent them. During my time as a Five Guys employee, I was routinely disrespected by my supervisors, and I know I would have felt legitimate fear of losing hours, being passed over for promotions, or being otherwise retaliated against for speaking out. By passing LD 1711 you can ensure that our state holds law breaking companies accountable and creates a culture of compliance. I want to feel safe going to work, and I know I'm not alone. I urge you to vote ought to pass.