

**Testimony In Support of LD 1964, An Act to Implement the  
Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and  
Medical Leave Benefits Program**

Mollie Barnathan  
Portland, Maine  
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Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Mollie Barnathan and I live in Portland. I am submitting this testimony to share my strong support of paid family and medical leave for Maine. I am a certified postpartum doula and the co-founder of North Light Newborns, with seven years of experience helping families in the Greater Portland area. I have a Masters in Public Health with a background in global health and community development. I'm also the proud - and very busy - mom of three young girls.

In my work as a postpartum doula, I have the honor and privilege of helping parents navigate one of the most fragile, most joyful, and most terrifying times of their lives. Sometimes, my work can seem simple - providing a nutritious meal or carefully folding a stack of laundry. Other parts are more complex, like teaching a new mom what the correct latch looks like or exactly the right tap on an infant's back to settle their stomach. And some of my most difficult work requires calming a mother - not the newborn - through tears, as the rollercoaster of postpartum hormones travels through the body and recognizing when a clinical diagnosis of a postpartum mood disorder may be necessary.

I was drawn to this work because of my own very real and very scary experience with postpartum depression and OCD. My husband returned to work several weeks after my first daughter was born, leaving me as her sole caretaker for ten hours a day. We were new to Maine, living far from family, and had very few social supports. I was struggling to breastfeed, delirious with sleep deprivation and tormented by intrusive thoughts of harming my newborn and myself. Paralyzed by panic, I told my husband and my parents that I could not take care of the baby and begged to be hospitalized. Using our own professional networks and financial means, they mobilized care providers (psychiatrist, psychologist, overnight nanny, and daytime nanny) to support my mental health, keep me out of the hospital, and get our family back on track.

The families I work with have the economic privilege to afford the care that should be given to all. We all know the proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” - well I’m here to tell you that village does not exist for low-income families. The lack of quality, universal, paid family and medical leave exacerbates health issues for both newborns and their parents.

Scarce or no paid leave contributes to delaying babies' immunizations, postpartum mood disorders and other health problems, and causes mothers to give up breastfeeding early. Many who take unpaid leave go into debt and some are forced to seek public assistance. Essentially, lack of paid family and medical leave takes our most vulnerable new parents and gives them the least access to things like rest, restoration, and support.

LD 1964 would provide life-changing support for families at a critical juncture in their lives. While nothing can prepare you to become a parent, the very least we can do as a society is provide a benefit that literally every other single industrialized country in the world is able to offer.

I hope you will vote ought-to-pass on LD 1964 and I thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

Sincerely,  
Mollie Barnathan, MPH