

Joseph Brown  
Milo  
LD 1964

Joseph Brown, Milo, ME  
Testimony in Support of LD 1964  
Committee on Labor and Housing  
Public Hearing: May 25, 2023

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written 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.

My name is Joseph Brown and I'm a resident of Milo. I am a small business owner – I own a small trucking business. I am also a husband and father of three kids all under the age of five.

Last December, as our family was getting ready for our yearly Christmas party with my wife's family, the phone rang. It was the doctor: Our youngest child had an abnormal kidney test result, and we needed to schedule an emergency appointment with a kidney specialist in Portland immediately.

My wife and I started preparing for the worst, and I thought to myself: "Me and my wife are both self-employed, so how can I keep my business running to support my family and be three hours away while Winnie goes through all these tests? What if she needs to do more?" Luckily it was a false alarm. But not every parent is as fortunate.

This is not the first time I've been faced with the difficult decision of choosing between financial security and taking time off to care for a family member. I couldn't take any time off when my first two children were born. In the case of my second child, I returned to work the very next day, which ended up putting physical and mental stress on my wife (she wasn't supposed to lift anything heavier than a newborn for 6-8 weeks, but we had a one-year-old at home).

At that time, I was employed at a small business where I was one of five employees and my boss couldn't afford to offer paid leave. I couldn't afford to take any time away from work – but even if unpaid leave were an option, there was no guarantee that my job would be waiting for me when I returned. I just couldn't take that risk, especially with a family to support.

My situation is a great example of why you should consider removing the exemptions of small businesses from certain parts of this bill relating to retaliation or job protection. All employees, regardless of how small their employer is, should have meaningful access to this paid leave program. Without protections from retaliation or job loss, folks cannot actually take paid leave if they need it – in my view, this renders the program pointless.

"Life happens" to almost everyone at some point, and usually when we least expect it. As a small business owner, I experienced firsthand how these situations can leave small businesses quite vulnerable. But I'm not alone – other self-employed folks in my area have had similar experiences with facing a serious medical issue without any access to paid leave.

All working Mainers, whether we're in business for ourselves or working for someone else, should be able to take care of themselves or a loved one in times of illness or other crises without going into debt, or putting their jobs or businesses at risk.

A state paid family & medical leave system would provide all working people with the flexibility and security to take time away from work to care for themselves or family, and it would also help support businesses.

LD 1964 is a chance for the Legislature to have a major, positive impact on small business owners, employees, and their families. We cannot let this opportunity pass

us by – Maine’s businesses and working families desperately need a state paid family & medical leave program. I respectfully urge you to vote yes on this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Joseph Brown, owner of J. Brown & Sons Trucking LLC

Milo, ME