

**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**

Cara Courchesne
Lewiston, Maine
May 25, 2023

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

My name is Cara Courchesne and I live in Lewiston. I am testifying in support of paid family and medical leave for Maine.

We often hear about paid leave as it relates to giving birth or adopting a child, and how paid leave allows time for parents and a new baby to bond. However, the time I had with my daughter after she was born was less about being able to bond. It was frankly all I could do to make it through my maternity leave.

I had three months of unpaid maternity leave. Throughout those three months, I was brutally depressed and anxious. I had pre-existing depression and anxiety, and had an absolutely horrendous time breastfeeding. When I was about to throw in the breastfeeding towel, we found out (via a traumatic health episode) that our daughter had some significant allergies. Formula for this kind of allergy wasn't covered by our insurance, and would have cost us \$700-\$900 a month. I recommitted to breastfeeding and entirely overhauled how I ate so I could keep my baby fed and safe. I stayed up for hours overnight pumping milk with a hospital grade breast pump.

It's not an exaggeration to say I am not sure that I would have been able to function if I had to leave my daughter and go to work - all while trying to figure out how to manage these health challenges and appointments.

My story is one of significant privilege. I was lucky that I was salaried and had an understanding employer. I was lucky that we could afford for me to take time unpaid, and/but we could only do so after months of saving and because my husband's salary was much higher than mine. I was lucky we had nine months to plan. I was lucky I had nine months to save up as much sick and vacation time as I could, all while managing a difficult pregnancy.

However, as things currently stand, I know we would not be so lucky - and certainly not if there was an emergency. I am now a small business owner and my finances are far less flexible and have the added (and significant) costs of raising a child. And of course, as a small business owner, I only get paid as much as I pay myself. I don't have any paid time off at all, and I understand that's a trade that I've made for the joy and responsibility of owning my own business.

And yet, it is not lost on me that if something were to happen to my health, to my daughter's health, or to my parents', I would be entirely unable to pay my bills and care for myself or my family. Without a statewide program that supports all workers, I wouldn't be able to afford to pay myself to take leave - and in most of the emergency cases that we can all imagine, I probably wouldn't have a choice.

I hope we don't need to continue to address challenges like these via individual actions that instead need to be part of systemic change. Mainers need paid family medical leave. It's an embarrassment that in the United States we are doing this in such a piecemeal way. And - as you all know - Mainers lead. Mainers help Mainers. We show up, whether it's helping to get your neighbor's car out of a snowbank or making a casserole to give to new parents. If we have to lead this charge, then so be it.

I hope you will support LD 1964. Please let me know if I can answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CC' with a flourish at the end.

Cara Courchesne
Lewiston, ME
cara.courchesne@gmail.com