

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Shaun Donnelly and I live in the town of Arundel. I am testifying today in strong support for the enactment of a Paid Family and Medical Leave program in the State of Maine.

I have been self-employed for the past 12 years, and I know firsthand the challenges that come with needing time off for personal or family health issues, and the strain it puts on our business and finances. When you run your own business, time away from work costs you double, not just in time that you're not getting paid, but also the time not spent lining up more work to keep the business going. This often means that there are times when I simply cannot afford to step away, and am forced to ignore my own needs and those of my closest loved ones.

When I was 20 years old, I was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis, a chronic health condition that is further aggravated by excessive stress. Imagine the difficulty of being self-employed and paying for your own health insurance, knowing that any time you step away from work risks not being able to pay your bills. Not having the capacity to take care of yourself, nevermind the people you love the most, is probably the worst kind of stress I've ever felt.

Another thing to consider when you're self-employed is that most government safety nets don't apply to you. Unemployment insurance, workers compensation, and other protections I have to cover on my own savings. The benefit of a state-wide PFML program is that with every worker and employer contributing together into the same pool, the individual costs will be far lower than anything sole proprietors like me can afford.

Finally, a state-wide program makes my business more competitive, because large corporate employers can already afford to offer paid family and medical leave to their employees that smaller Maine businesses cannot. As I look to expand and hire people to work with me, they'll have the same level of protection that they would have with a much larger company. This would help level the playing field, and allow more Maine small businesses to compete for and retain skilled workers.

I also feel very strongly that we should not privatize the administration of this new PFML program. Such a move would leave the state dependent on a single corporate entity's proprietary methods of managing this fund. I believe that the costs of running this program should go to Maine workers, not an insurance conglomerate seeking a profit on our own tax dollars.

In conclusion, I urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1964. It would benefit every working Mainer equally, including self-employed folks like me and our families, and make our state a more competitive place to do business. Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

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