

Sarah Elhassan
South Portland
LD 1964

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and esteemed members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Sarah Elhassan. I live in South Portland and I'm testifying in support of LD 1964 and a Paid Family & Medical Leave program. I'm a doctor who practices geriatric medicine. Many of my patients have dementia or Alzheimer's disease and reside in nursing homes or assisted living facilities. Although they're cared for medically, a number of them deal with added psychological distress because they're separated from their loved ones. This separation isn't due to neglect. Without paid family leave, these families can't afford to take time off from work to adequately tend to their loved ones' needs.

One of my patients was devastated when her family put her in an assisted living facility. She couldn't cope, and attempted to take her life. She felt as though her family had abandoned her. But that wasn't the case: because her family didn't have the ability to take the time to care for her needs, they had no other option. Imagine how different things would've been if this family had paid family leave. Imagine the sense of security and ease this program would've given them.

Maine's population is the oldest in the nation, which means we have a growing sandwich generation of Mainers who care for their aging parents while simultaneously raising children. They're doing double-duty, and they're stretched thin. If their kids get sick while their parents need care, what are they supposed to do? These families often use up their vacation time, but that's not enough, not in these scenarios. They have no choice but to take unpaid leave. This is an extreme burden, emotionally and financially.

It's clear to me that paid family leave would improve the quality of life of those who are sick and require help. Paid family leave would also improve the quality of caregiving, as families would be able to spend more time with loved ones who need their support.

Maine's aging population isn't getting the care they deserve because we don't have paid family leave in place. We must change that. We must prioritize the dignity and well-being of Maine's families. We must pass this bill. Thank you.