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Today is the first day of my maternity leave - if I weren't anticipating labor any moment I would love to be there in person!

If you've had children, I don't have to explain to you why parental leave is necessary. We all know that taking care of a newborn is a demanding full time job for many months (and arguably years). We all know that recovering from birth can be a terrible ordeal - it was two months before I could manage walking to the end of my street due to perineal tearing. We all know that bearing and raising children is a life changing miracle that is a central, powerful experience that connects us all as humans.

So how can we still be a state that does not have paid family and medical leave? The basic fact is that parents in Maine work and our paychecks matter to our families and communities. I live in Portland so I see the impact that the lack of financial support can ultimately have on our community, with families overflowing from shelters and living in cars and tents. The economic argument for this policy is easy - you support people when they need it most to prevent dropping into poverty, which ends up costing the government and businesses more. And when you consider that Maine is the oldest state in the nation, we really are staring down (and already experiencing) a demographic catastrophe if we don't do something about it. This is an easy investment in our state.

Now, I'm about to have my second maternity leave supported by my private employer and I want to make something clear - parity for all parents and caregivers with the types of benefits covered by private employers would be a good start, but it's not enough. When I returned to work last time, I was exclusively breastfeeding, which has tremendous benefit to babies and is cheap and reliable compared to formula. I lasted two weeks pumping, even working remotely. Then a year ago with the high cost of childcare and hard work of caring for a toddler with another on the way my husband and I decided it was best for him to leave the workforce for a while. Even for us with financial privilege, some of the best benefits available in Maine, and grandparents nearby, it's not enough. Working parents are struggling and the system is still built around archaic ideas of gender roles and placing no economic value on caregiving. All caregivers in Maine need help and this should be just the start of that if we want thriving families and a growing economy. Thank you.