

Amina Hassan
Lewiston
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Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing: My name is Amina Hassan. I have been an advocate for women and children for more than a decade, since I was a student at Lewiston High School. Two years ago I founded Her Safety Net, a community-based nonprofit which works to protect people from gender-based violence.

At Her Safety Net, we focus on women's personal, professional, health, and economic development. We meet them where they need to be met. This allows them to flourish in our community, and makes our community stronger in turn.

I am here today because it is time for Mainers to come together to do the same for ourselves, and for each other. It is time to pass a Paid Family & Medical Leave policy that will benefit everyone in Maine.

Here's what PFML would look like in my line of work. Someone going through domestic violence would get time to figure out what to do, where to live, who to contact—without worrying about not having food on the table. They have time to see a doctor, if they need to, and to heal. For most of us, missing even a day's paycheck isn't an option. But sometimes we need that time off so we can come back stronger.

During the pandemic, I helped hundreds of people file for unemployment. Some of those people might not have needed to leave their jobs for good if this policy had been in place. When people can't take medical or safe leave, they can be fired or have to quit, and they might have trouble reentering the workforce. But if someone can take a few weeks' leave, they can start right where they left. People can come back to a job where they've built good relationships, where they feel confident they can excel. And that helps build stronger work environments.

This issue is personal for me as well. My family came to the U.S. when I was 16 years old, and my mom began working as soon as she got her work permit. She worked for her employer for 7 years, but last year, she got injured. The company told her after two days out that she must return to work or lose her job—even after providing a note from her doctor. This was not the first time. She had been injured many times at work before, but had never complained because she loved her job and didn't want to endanger her livelihood. She needed to provide for her family.

This isn't an uncommon story, especially among immigrants, Mainers of color, and other vulnerable workers. We need a strong policy that protects all Maine workers from the threat of retaliation or firing. It doesn't matter who you are, where you're from, or what you do for a living: we all need to take time to care for ourselves or our loved ones. We should all be able to do this without having to choose between working while injured, or feeding our families.

I hope you will support the sponsor's amendment and advance the Commission's recommendations to create a Paid Family & Medical Leave program that works for ALL Mainers.

Thank you.