



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN MAINE

Loring House

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Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and Members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is John Hennessy, and I am the Advocacy Director for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine offering this testimony in support of LD 1964 – An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family Medical Leave Benefits Program.

The Episcopal Church (the “Church”) supports a uniform paid family leave policy across our Church, and that this is a justice issue which we are obligated as Christians to support all workers, including LGBTQ+ and families of color and advocate without further delay.

The Church believes that the birth or adoption of a child is a cause of celebration for parents, family and the entire community and that an entire inclusive community has responsibility for supporting a family in raising a child; and that family members, inclusive of chosen family, often need to care for one another in sickness, and that this care and ministry serves to give confidence of your loving care; and that individuals suffering from illness may not be able to work for a period of time.

The Church recognizes that the federal and state governments have a role in ensuring those who are sick are cared for, and that all have sufficient healthcare, enough to eat, adequate housing, and that illness does not economically devastate families. We call on the government to institute a funding mechanism for citizens to take paid family leave to care for a newborn child, a foster or adopted child, or immediate family members who require care during illness, as well as fully providing paid sick leave possible.

Our call and imperative, as followers of Jesus Christ, is to ground the decisions and choices we make for the church in our common theology. The incarnation lives at the core of Anglican identity and theology. What the incarnation means for us today is this: through Jesus, God is revealed to us in the physical and temporal things of everyday life.

Through Jesus’ earthly life, teaching, and sacrificial love, we come to see God in our own earthly lives, in the daily circumstances of human interaction, relationship, challenge, heartbreak, conflict, and joy. The gift of paid family leave – the chance to care for an infant or child new to the family, the opportunity to care for a sick family member, the ability to step away from one’s professional occupation to minister to the needs of loved ones without loss of income or security – is rooted in our incarnational theology. Through it we have the chance to focus entirely on the nurture of relationships, to discover God anew in the space between people, and live more fully into Jesus’ commandments to love one another.

One of the seven components of the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement’s Way of Love is “rest.” While no one ever will describe family leave to care for a new child or infant to the

family or nurse a sick family member as a vacation or a long period of rest, family leave does afford individuals the opportunity to leave behind, for a time, the concerns, anxieties, and deadlines of their paid work to focus that energy on the care of family. This time creates the possibility that the family, in whatever its precise circumstance and composition, can enjoy the fullness of time together in all its parts – work and rest, worship and prayer, blessing and forgiveness. Family leave creates space in time. Creating space in time to nurture our families is not a break or a vacation, but the very essence of living.

Further, the family unit is understood, in both our Hebrew and Christian scriptures, as the central and sacred entity in which we teach and learn and grow deeper in our faith, with which we worship God and follow Jesus. Family leave is a practical, accessible way to strengthen the family unit, to care and nurture it so that it remains intact, strong, and focused in its capacity to grow and nurture the faith. The gift of paid family leave roots us, deeper and more firmly, in our incarnational theology, in the Way of Love, and in our scriptural tradition. Through it, we can live more faithfully into what we profess to believe, and the Way of Jesus we follow.

The Church believes Maine policymakers have an opportunity to step up and pass paid family and medical leave that ensure the ability to care for every Mainer considered family. Comprehensive paid leave is crucial for the health of Maine families and the strength of our state's economy.