

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and honorable members of the Joint Committee on Labor and Housing,

My name is Emily Ingwersen and I am a small business owner from Arundel, I also had the privilege of serving as the small business representative on the legislative Commission to develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits program.

I write today to express my support of LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.

I found my way to this issue following the births of my children, for which I did not have access to Paid Family leave in any meaningful way. As the owner of a small business when my youngest was born, I had no choice but to return to work immediately after her birth. My company is a construction firm and I found it exhausting to bring her to jobsites all day, hold her in one arm while typing at my computer in the other and be up all-night tending to her needs. Had I had access to paid leave it would have enabled me to take on fewer projects or hire additional help to cover my responsibilities during that time.

While serving on the Commission my father was diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer and I had to travel back and forth to Florida to help coordinate and manage his care until his passing in March of 2022. Paid leave would have afforded me the opportunity to spend more time with my Dad in his final days and to make sure that those days were as good as they could have been. Through my work on the Commission and my personal experiences I know how vital access to Paid Leave is.

As a business owner I have, throughout the years, witnessed others in similar situations and with similar experiences. I have seen carpenters work through broken bones and other injuries, parents return to work immediately following the birth of their children and adult children struggle to manage the care of their elderly loved ones. I have also been unable to provide this benefit to myself or my employees given the astronomical cost of private insurance options compared to the paltry benefits offered.

This bill would help level the playing field between small businesses like mine and large companies who are capable of providing this benefit at scale, as well as between men and women in the workforce.

The pandemic has highlighted the fact that women are disproportionately affected when leave is required to tend to familial needs and a robust paid leave program would reduce the number of (mostly) women who are forced to leave their jobs to have a child or take on other care work.

It is critically important to ensure that job protections are in place for all employers to prevent the unintended consequence of women once again being forced to choose between their job and their family and that people who give birth are afforded the opportunity to tend to both their medical needs as well as have bonding time with their child. I encourage you to support a minimum combined total of 16 weeks of leave for these rare circumstances that can have lasting consequences for families.

As the owner of a construction company, I fully understand the daily grind of running a business and the balancing act of managing expenses required to keep it afloat. I also recognize that the folks I work with have lives outside of work and a need for family or medical leave *will* arise during the course of their lives. Having workers out without this benefit in place does not benefit my business at all, in fact, it puts it at risk of losing trained, competent workers who are not easy to replace, especially in the current job market.

During my time serving on the Commission, we had the chance to hear from other small business owners from around the state, the majority of whom support a PFML program in Maine, and indicated that they have had employees out of work due to these life events. A large majority of employers we heard from also indicated that they would be willing to contribute to a PFML program so that their workers can access its benefits. This program is affordable to me and other businesses like mine, and would provide a massive benefit to small scale companies like mine who can't compete with larger enterprises. Small businesses like mine understand that life circumstances necessitating leave *will* arise and financial support of our workers through that time is critical to ensure their continued stability through challenging times as well as enable their return to work when all is well.

As a Commission member I also had the opportunity to learn firsthand about other states' PFML programs and was pleased to hear that the results have been resoundingly positive. No one reported abuse or misuse of the program and everyone reported many positive outcomes.

In short, I dedicated two years to the Commission in hopes that other Mainers would not have to struggle through the same experiences that I had. We Mainers are hardworking and woven from a strong moral fiber that deeply connects us to our state, our careers and our families. We want to do our jobs well and take care of each other and it is my hope that the hard work of many of the folks you see in the room with you today will result in access to Paid Leave for all of my neighbors, so that they will be able to bond with their babies, tend to an injury or care for a loved one in their final days without the added stress of worrying about how to pay the bills. I urge this committee to support LD 1964 and appreciate the time you are dedicating to this important issue.

Emily Ingwersen  
Arundel  
LD 1964