

The Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
131st Maine Legislature
Testimony from Katherine Johnston, Resident, Hallowell, ME

In Support Of

L.D. 1964 “An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program”

Thursday, May 25, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, distinguished members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Katherine Johnston and I am a resident of Hallowell. I am the mother of two young daughters, ages 3 and 8 months old.

I am writing in strong support of L.D. 1964. This bill will provide critical support to families and businesses and will make Maine a far more attractive place to raise a family. As the oldest state in the nation, we need families to choose Maine. Our communities and our businesses depend on this.

I will be brief and focus my comments on the significance to families with newborns. I started drafting this testimony at 3:00am when my baby woke us up because she is teething. I was irritated and bone tired and it occurred to me how quickly we all forget how impossible the early days with a newborn are. I am only mere weeks away from this life-altering experience of being up at all hours of the night for months on end and even I have repressed it. It is barely possible to function as a human in this world when you are awake around the clock, only sleeping in 30-minute bursts, and yet that is what new parents endure. *It is impossible to fathom unless you are in the thick of it.* Biology makes us forget.

Without a paid leave system, new parents often return to work within only weeks of having a baby who needs around-the-clock care. There is a reason sleep deprivation is considered a form of torture. Yet our society expects us to return to work in a barely functioning capacity - and where will that baby even go with the current state of child care? - or give up an income all together. It does not make sense. I did not return to work, and I didn't have access to pay or benefits after about a month because I was ineligible for the current system of unpaid FMLA. This is common. This benefits no one, not the baby, not the caregivers, not the employer.

I've seen examples of friends who have had access to paid leave in other states and it is incredible what this means in terms of setting a foundation for families forever into the future. They develop parenting competence, true partnership, and face the hardest weeks of life with a financial safety net. It is transformative. It is humane.

This is a wise investment by and for Maine that will more than pay for itself many times over in better outcomes for families, communities, and businesses. ***It is the humane thing to do.*** Please pass L.D. 1964.