

# JESSICA L. LALIBERTE

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May 25, 2023

Senator Michael Tipping, Chair  
Representative Amy Roeder, Chair  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

**Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program**

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

My name is Jessica L. Laliberte. I am a resident of Waterville. I am sorry I am unable to be there today in person to offer my testimony in support of **LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program**, but as is the case with caregivers, the needs of my mother take priority.

In May 2021, my mother fell ill. Emergency surgery and a subsequent cancer diagnosis followed. When we learned of my mother's diagnosis and treatment plan, I reached out to my friend and attorney. I knew I did not qualify for the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) as I had started a new job just three months before my mom's illness. I knew the state of Maine had a parallel law, but I failed to meet the criteria for that as well. My paycheck was my sole source of income. I had to find a way to make my job and meet her care needs work. I tried for eight plus months to keep all the balls in the air. It was unsustainable. I not only crashed; I burned out. In early 2022, I had to leave the workforce to care for my mother.

It has been 16 months since I have earned a paycheck. Caregiving is stressful in and of itself. There is the additional stress that comes from not having a paycheck. Bills don't stop because a loved one takes ill.

Being a full-time caregiver has been the most difficult job I have ever had. But it taught me so much. I am stronger than I ever thought I was. I was tasked with doing things I had never done before, things I never thought I could do. But I did them. I became a quick study. It taught me empathy. It gave me a greater appreciation for the work I did and for the under-recognized work caregivers do, the stress and sacrifices they face.

But caregiving also broke me in many ways. I not only lost my income, insurance, and retirement contributions, I lost my sense of identity. A lack of financial stability ends hopes and

dreams. I loved the work I did. I so miss the life I had before cancer and COVID took it over, but I would do it over again and again. My mother was worth it. And I am so thankful she is now in remission.

As someone who has represented the business industry before the legislature, I know the argument against paid family leave is that it will place a financial burden on employers and businesses. On the flip side, when one has had to give up their paycheck, they are not spending money in businesses. Discretionary spending stops.

This should not be a partisan issue. Eventually, we will all find ourselves in positions where we may have to choose between providing care to a loved one or our paycheck. It is a quality-of-life issue. Maine is the oldest state in the nation. We also face a workforce shortage. This is not a democrat or republican issue. If you have loved ones, you could find yourself in this situation. Do we want to lose workers because they are faced with the choice of a paycheck or the care of a sick parent? Should we make people choose?

I urge you to vote **ought to pass** on **LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.**

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Waterville

LD 1964

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