



**Maine Education Association**  
Grace Leavitt **President** | Jesse Hargrove **Vice President** | Beth French **Treasurer**  
Rebecca Cole **NEA Director** | Rachelle Bristol **Executive Director**

**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  
Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing  
May 25, 2023**

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Labor and Housing Committee,

My name is Grace Leavitt. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I am serving as President of the Maine Education Association while on leave from teaching Spanish in MSAD 51. The MEA is the union that represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, both the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, along with students in teacher prep programs as well as many retired educators.

I am testifying in support of LD 1964 An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.

First, MEA supports LD 1964 because it is the right thing to do—all employees should have access to the time needed to care for their family members who are ill or for their newborn or newly adopted child as well as for themselves without having to choose between taking the time to meet these needs and having the income to continue to provide for such basic ongoing needs as food and shelter or even possibly risk losing their job altogether. It is an impossible choice to make, and no one should find themselves in that position. Having paid leave benefits both the employee and the employer, something which is even more important in these most challenging times.

For example, MEA has heard from educators who try to plan a pregnancy so that they have their child in June in order to have the time needed to bond with and care for their newborn over the summer, but of course plans don't always become reality. Then the choice is potentially unpaid leave, at a time when you can least afford it, or the decision may even be to leave the position. While educators do have some paid sick time, it is limited, especially for those newer to the profession. Given the shortages of educators we are all aware of, and even the workforce shortages in virtually all sectors, having the program that LD 1964 calls for just makes sense. Again, for both public sector and private sector employers and employees, a paid family and medical leave program will have benefits for all.

MEA also supports LD 1964 because our members see the direct impact on students, both on their wellbeing and on their learning. When parents and guardians do not have access to paid leave for the types of situations included in this proposed legislation, the stress, both emotional and financial, is enormous and takes a toll on the entire family, including children. Additionally, allowing new parents paid time with a new member of their family helps ensure that the child is provided the start in life that leads to proper, healthy development and a good initial foundation for their future growth and learning.

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After the past few years, the old saying of “If you don’t have your health, you don’t have anything” is even more obviously true and is understood by all. Being able to afford to tend to the health needs of a loved one or of oneself is of critical importance to a healthy, productive society. Let’s make Maine the next state to have paid family and medical leave and maybe some day our country will no longer be one of just a handful of countries<sup>1</sup> around the world without this essential program.

MEA urges you to vote ‘ought to pass’ on LD 1964.

<sup>1</sup><https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/paid-family-leave-across-oecd-countries/>