

## Testimony in support of Paid Family and Medical Leave in the State of Maine

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I am writing today in support of Paid Family and Medical Leave for the State of Maine. I am not only a mother of two, but have over a decade of experience supervising staff and managing budgets in higher education. I have a B.S. and M.Ed. from the University of Maine, and worked at several colleges and universities on the eastern seaboard before returning to Maine in 2019.

I believe that paid family and medical leave is a necessity if we hope to attract and retain employees and residents in our state. The benefits to the child, working parent, and economy are significant and well known. Here are two resources that outline these benefits:

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/04/feature-parental-leave>  
<https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/cache/files/646d2340-dcd4-4614-ada9-be5b1c3f445c/jec-fact-sheet---economic-benefits-of-paid-leave.pdf>

We have a responsibility to provide safe, nurturing environments for our children and equity in our workplaces. Lack of paid family leave disproportionately impacts women, and has well documented negative impacts on children and families. Many employers allow employees to utilize sick and vacation time during unpaid FMLA, but this outdated practice is not a replacement for paid leave.

I will share my own experience here to illustrate how this practice plays out in reality:

I gave birth to my second child last summer. My employer allows staff to utilize their accrued sick and vacation time during FMLA- however, my maternity leave was still largely unpaid- after all, pregnancy requires many doctor's appointments even in the best circumstances, and if you experience a high risk pregnancy you are subject to even more testing and monitoring, all of which require use of one's paid time off (PTO). I also had to use some of my annual leave time to cover COVID daycare closures for my older child, times when he was sick, etc. **There is a false assumption that standard paid time off is an acceptable replacement for paid FMLA- however, life goes on- it is not feasible to save all of your PTO for a future FMLA need, even if you plan for a pregnancy. These impacts are compounded when you take into account lack of affordable, high quality childcare in much of our state.**

Lack of paid family leave created a hardship for my family. After exhausting my paid time off to cover basic expenses and my family's health insurance during my leave, I was left with little time to use for follow-up medical appointments for myself, follow-up appointments for my baby, or time to take care of her when she inevitably got sick after

starting daycare. As an individual with a history of post-partum depression and anxiety, access to counseling and follow-up care was critical to my wellbeing, my child's wellbeing, and my ability to perform my job well. All of these things are at risk when an individual is expected to use up their standard PTO while on FMLA. I'm fortunate to have found a way forward, albeit with far less in my savings account, but many cannot. Returning to work is challenging enough after circumstances that necessitate FMLA. The lack of paid leave creates situations where individuals have to consider whether it makes sense for them to continue working at all, a plight working parents, especially mothers, know all too well.

Many loyal, hardworking Mainers would prefer to return to jobs they love and are dedicated to after the birth of a child, caring for a loved one with significant illness, or other life changes, but are forced to make hard decisions after exhausting their savings in order to provide basic care for themselves and/or family members during a necessary leave. This is not only detrimental to the individual and their family, but to our society as a whole- business lose employees, and children face negative outcomes when it comes to health, wellbeing, and educational attainment, parents face increased anxiety and financial stress when they are most vulnerable. We are the oldest state in the nation- we should be doing everything we can to create a quality of life that fits our motto- the way life should be- so that our citizens and economy can thrive now and in the future.