

Shaad Masood
Lewiston, ME
May 25, 2023

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

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

My name is Shaad Masood and I am from Lewiston, Maine. I write today in support of LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.

As a full-time ER nurse through the COVID pandemic, with a young child, working wife, and aging parents, I have experienced all-too-recently the cracks in our care infrastructure in Maine. I'd like to share just two personal stories today to encourage you to support this bill.

First, in the spring of 2020, as I went daily into a metaphorical burning building with a piece of plastic over my face, my wife joined a generation of women in Maine now defined by job loss and decreased labor force participation¹ due to the closure of our child's daycare center. We were forced to make the impossible choice between her job (as an educator) and mine. Given the greater need for essential healthcare workers at that moment, we became a one-income family overnight. Needless to say, this demanded a radical shift in our daily living and significantly increased the amount of stress impacting our own health and ability to care for those who rely on us – not just our three aging parents and young daughter, but also the increasing number of sick patients I began encountering at work. What is worse – we know that we are *luckier* than those with far fewer resources facing similar impossibilities – this includes single parents; part-time, temporary and seasonal workers; and Black, Indigenous, immigrant and families of color who already face economic marginalization.² Of course, the pandemic only highlighted the gender, racial, and economic disparities in our care system. If this bill becomes law, it would work to decrease those disparities and begin to ensure that fewer people have to face the false “choice” between one's family and one's ability to care for and support that family.

Finally, PFML for Maine is good for not only gender and racial equity but is good for our state's economy and workforce. This past year – with my wife just recently securing a full-time job again and our family still in economic recovery post-pandemic – my 75 year-old father went into rapid medical decline and now requires constant care. Though federally mandated family medical leave protects my job stability, I am forced to pay for my FMLA through the use of my earned vacation time – ironically called “choice” time. As a healthcare worker, I am emotionally, physically, and psychologically burned out after the past few years. These days, there is still an

¹ Maine Department of Labor (2021). [“Maine's Labor Market During the Pandemic: Impact by Gender”](#)

² National Partnership for Women & Families (2021). [“Called to Care: A Racially Just Recovery Demands Paid Family and Medical Leave”](#)

expectation to get 40 plus hours of work done every week, along with unaccounted family care work and the labor of scheduling and reporting FMLA time. My limited employer-provided paid leave pays for only *some* of the time I spend calling doctors, managing bills, and keeping up with maintenance care for my father. But there are days that will be unpaid, as “choice” time runs out but caring for a sick family member never does. Despite my hard work and commitment to becoming a nurse and caring for anyone who comes through the doors of an ER, that is not enough to keep myself or my family healthy through our own inevitable and unenviable care challenges. For now the choice is to stay employed. Should my father’s illness intensify or any other family member require care, I may not be able to continue nursing. For too many Mainers the balance between paid work and unpaid care work is a razor thin tightrope. Paid family leave would keep all of us upright and productive when the winds of fate blow the hardest.

If this bill is passed as law, it would go a long way toward keeping up with the needs of not only my family, but ALL Maine families in a 21st century economy. Of course, it would go the longest way toward meeting Maine’s care needs *as a public insurance plan, administered by and for the public.*

It has never been more obvious how deep the need is to develop our care infrastructure and there has never been a better opportunity in Maine’s history. Therefore, I urge you to support LD 1964 and be remembered as people who did the right thing. Thank you for your time and consideration on this important issue.

Sincerely,
Shaad Masood