

Catherine Rasco
Cape Elizabeth
LD 1964

Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comments in support of LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.

My name is Catherine Rasco and I am a resident of Cape Elizabeth. I'm also a small business owner – I am the founder and owner of Arabica Coffee in Portland.

I was 26 years old when Arabica opened – I started my own business to have control over my work-life balance. In particular, I wanted to be home with my newborn children for longer than the 2 weeks that was offered at most jobs at the time. New parents need support during this challenging and vulnerable time, and I feel blessed that I was able to be home after the birth of both of my daughters.

As a small business owner, I value my employees and I try to support them when they need extended time off for childbirth, serious medical reasons, or to care for a family member – but the only support I can offer is flexibility in their schedules. My small business does not have the financial resources to provide pay for extended leave.

A state paid family and medical leave program would help level the playing field between small businesses and larger, corporate businesses. In my industry, where corporate coffee chains offer employment that includes valuable benefits like dental insurance and paid family leave, a state paid leave program will help small, local coffee shops compete with corporate coffee chains for employees. I believe that a paid leave program would be a benefit to all businesses, regardless of size – when employees are healthy and ready to work, the entire business community and local economy benefit.

I would also like to voice support for a paid leave program that is state-administered instead of contracting with a private insurer, because I think Mainers would be better-served by the state in the long run. A publicly-administered program could help make sure the policy is less expensive and less complicated by: (a) removing profit motives; and (b) eliminating the need for the state to negotiate (and renegotiate) the government contract with a private insurer. I believe that a publicly-administered program would prevent small businesses – and the State of Maine – from being nicked and dimed on such a critical benefit.

It's been 28 years since I opened Arabica, and now I find myself at a different time in my life because now my elderly parents need support. Everyone, at certain times in their lives, will need care or need to provide care to their loved ones. This should not create financial insecurity and the potential loss of a job or a business.

LD 1964 presents us with a choice. We can choose to enact legislation that will support the hard working people of Maine during their most challenging and vulnerable times, and at the same time provide stability to the business community. I respectfully urge you to vote yes on this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Catherine Rasco, Cape Elizabeth
Owner of Arabica Coffee, Portland