

Senator Mike Tipping, Representative Amy Roeder and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Rebekah Sousa, and I live in Jefferson. I am writing you to testify in favor of LD 1964: An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program.

I often tell my kids that as an adult, one usually has to choose between two bad options, but in the absence of PFML, caregivers are given an impossible choice: care for sick loved ones or OR continue working and provide for them. As a mother, I cannot possibly imagine being away from one of my kids when they need me most- when they are sick and afraid and away from home, but in cases of serious hospitalizations that linger waiting for healing milestones or diagnostic testing, absence from work translates to less income, draining savings, job loss, incurring debt, family strain, and so on.

We had our 5th baby born 6 weeks early with a cleft lip and palate. While I was at Barbara Bush with him for 2 months, my husband was left to maintain the house, the rest of the kids, provide, and survive. We spent most of that time apart, which meant I was missing out on much needed support while he white-knuckled life at home. PFML would have given us breathing room and options to get through that window with a little more grace. It was an enormous strain on our marriage, our mental health, our kids, our savings, my physical health, our work etc.

PFML creates a safety net that hopefully most people never need, but should they find themselves in that desperate place, it keeps a few bad days from becoming a downhill treadmill into financial and personal ruin. It is scary enough to face serious illness or accompany a family member through a medical emergency; people should not have to worry about their world beyond the hospital walls crumbling as well.

When each of my 5 children were born, PFML was not available to me nor to my husband. We're tough, independent, we made it work, but I would love to see better for my neighbors and for my children. It would be such a gift to spend the first few weeks with a new member of the family bonding and resting. I've been blessed with very family-friendly employers, but with PFML, they could have been spared from carrying a weak link in the chain. When I straddled the two horses of new-mother and employee- I was fairly ineffective at both. Instead,

affording families that bonding time sets with less stress and worry them up for a better life together.

I hope that we make Family Paid Medical Leave available for all working families in Maine. Please vote in favor of LD 1964. Thank you for your time and attention.

Rebekah Sousa