

Sarah Tomasz
Winslow
LD 1964

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and esteemed members of the Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Dr. Sarah Tomasz. I live in Winslow and I'm testifying in support of LD 1964 and a Paid Family & Medical Leave program.

I am a family physician who cares for individuals throughout the entire lifespan, including care for pregnant and postpartum people and their babies. My postpartum patients are the first that come to mind when I think about the importance of paid family leave. It takes six to eight weeks to physically recover from childbirth, when everything is normal. Many of my patients have been forced to return to work before 6 weeks postpartum due to the inability to financially support their families during their postpartum recovery. After pregnancy, women are left with a wound in their uterus from where the placenta detaches from the uterine cavity. The average placenta is 22 cm in diameter. We wouldn't force someone who had an open wound the size of a soccer ball back to work if it was located somewhere where we could see it. The reality is, that all over this state we are forcing women back to work with wounds the size of soccer balls, and because it is located somewhere where we can't see it, many people pretend like it doesn't matter. This increases the patient's risk of both hemorrhage and infection. Without paid family leave, many new mothers have no choice but to return to work before they're ready physically, not to mention emotionally and psychologically.

I have seen women, because of their work demands, miss postpartum follow up visits. This increases the risk of postpartum complications, including hemorrhage, infection, thromboembolism, and postpartum depression. Without the time to seek necessary care, new parents are more likely to ignore symptoms that may even be life threatening. It also increases their risk of not having access to appropriate, highly effective contraception. This increases their risks of a future unplanned pregnancy.

Both mom and baby deserve all the support they can get during this critical time. The attachment period following childbirth is so crucial for a child's development. Removing a baby from their mother's care too soon causes life long trauma. It is well documented in medical literature that early attachment to caregivers is critical for the development of a normal healthy newborn brain. Paid family leave is critical to the wellbeing of both new parents and babies.

There are also postpartum issues to consider. Due to various pregnancy complications, many individuals have to take time off before giving birth. In some cases, they require hospitalization for weeks or even months. As a result, these new parents often exhaust their FMLA and run out of savings. They then have no other option but to sacrifice bonding time with their baby and return to work immediately, sometimes even before their babies are out of the NICU. Paid family leave would prevent separation of critically ill newborns and their parents.

Lack of paid family leave also affects people with other medical concerns. I have sick or elderly patients who end up in nursing homes because their families can't afford to take time off of work to care for them. Paid family leave would improve their quality of life, as people who are able to be cared for at home have lower rates of complications than those who are in facilities. With paid family leave, a person wouldn't have to worry about losing their income to look after a sick parent. It may even help to relieve our overburdened skilled-living facilities and potentially decrease Maine's cost of healthcare overall.

Establishing paid family leave would give every Mainer, from new parents to those caring for aging relatives, the peace of mind they need and deserve to care for themselves and their loved ones. For the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of all Mainers, I urge you to pass this bill. Thank you.