

## 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

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Dear Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Nadine Twagirayezu. I currently reside in Cumberland County. I am the mother of a four-year-old daughter, and I serve on the board of the Maine Children's Alliance.

I moved to this country a few years ago from a small country in Africa where family is everything and children are considered treasures. In my native country, employers are mandated to provide family leave of at least fourteen fully paid weeks to allow parents the time to bond with their newborn and assist mothers with complications that may arise after birth. In addition to that, mothers are allowed at least one hour per day that they can use either in the beginning or at the end of their shift to accommodate and encourage breastfeeding. Because a child is considered not only to belong to their parents but to the larger family and community, people usually take turns to help the family with a newborn, especially in the first few months after birth.

I was very surprised to learn that things were very different in this country and in particular this state of Maine: employers are not required to provide parental leave to their employees. I learn that it was up to the employers to make policies around maternity leave or parental leave.

I was lucky enough to have an employer who understood my position and accepted to review the maternity leave policy that was in place and accepted to change it from four paid weeks to up to 16 weeks of which 12 are fully paid. During our discussion about the need for parental leave, I was very surprised to hear from one of my colleagues who had joined our organization from a government agency that when she gave birth to her son, she only had two weeks of leave after which she had to go back to work.

Here are some of the reasons why I believe employers should be required by the law to provide parental leave of at least 14 fully paid weeks:

- **This is a crucial time for parents and newborns to bond.** It is important, especially for mothers, not to have to choose between caring for their newborn and losing their employment, which can lead to homelessness. I understand there is a myth in this country of getting ready first before planning to have children, but unless one must plan to leave their employment after giving birth, there are things we, as humans, cannot plan for. I am thinking of all the complications that often arise after birth whether for mothers or babies, postpartum depression, sickness for parents or babies, and more. This should be a time for parents to spend time with their newborns and create that child-parent relationship from early on. I believe that it helps parents to appreciate and value the existence of their children as the more time they spend with them the more they love them, which also

helps children. It is funny how doctors encourage mothers to provide breast milk to their newborn as much as possible and yet they don't have time together. We cannot talk about families and ignore the relationship between mother and child, and we cannot talk about families and ignore the well-being of a child and a mother. And these things that start before a child is born (sometimes even required by the law) should be cherished even more after birth. Mothers need time to rest before they go back to work, they should not worry about their paychecks before they even leave the hospital.

- **It helps to create family cohesion and a healthy community:** I believe that there cannot be a safe and healthy community/society if it does not begin with families. I strongly believe that the well-being of one family is very important to take into consideration when we talk about community. There is no community without family; families need to be considered individually because everything always starts by an isolated case and there it spreads. By requiring family leave, we help parents to become confident in their new role. We can help alleviate family stress that sometimes leads to substance use disorder and addiction.
- **It helps with productivity and employee retention:** We all know how newborns can be unpredictable. Some are asleep all day long to be awake all night long. This means that parents, or at least one of them if there happen to be more than one parent in a household, need also have to be awake with the baby to care for them, feed, change them etc. If they work all day, this can affect productivity, job security, and the chance that they will decide to quit employment.

For all those reasons, I believe it is time for the legislature to realize that times have changed, there are not as many able to be stay-at-home moms these days, and raising a child is a responsibility of both parents. It is time that Maine passes a law to require businesses and government agencies alike to provide paid parental leave to both biological and adoptive parents regardless of how long they have been employed.

Thank you for your consideration.