

Nikki Williams
PORTLAND
LD 1964

Dear Committee members,

I'm writing today in support of the paid family and medical leave benefits program. I am the parent of two young children both born in Maine within the last 7 years. In order to cover my parental leave after both of my sons were born, I had to organize a patchwork of coverage to scrape together about 12 weeks of time to spend with my first son and 16 weeks of time with my second son. Most of that time was unpaid.

My first son was born 5 weeks early and spent the first 2.5 weeks of his life at Maine Medical Center. Thankfully, I had health insurance to cover the hospital bills, but no paid time for my parental leave. By the time my son came home from the hospital, I only had 10 weeks to spend with him in our home. It was heart-wrenching when I had to go back to work when he was just catching up to a normal birth weight at about 12.5 weeks.

With my second son, who was born 9 days after his due date, I had figured out how to cobble together a little more time at home with him. I applied for short-term disability, used all of the vacation and sick time that I was allowed, and on top of that elected to take one additional month of unpaid time so that I could be with him until he was 16 weeks old. It is absolutely disgraceful that parents have to jump through these hoops just to take UNPAID time off to be with their newborn children.

In this country, I am in a very privileged position that although it was challenging financially to take the unpaid time with both of my children, my family was able to make it work. Many families and individuals are not able to do that with some parents making the agonizing decision to go back to work well before they are emotionally, mentally and physically ready after giving birth.

It is unconscionable that this country with vast wealth and resources offers 0 weeks of paid parental leave. It is about time that Maine is stepping in to correct this awful situation.

Thank you for your critical attention to this matter.

Sincerely,