



May 25, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Honorable Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. We have advocated for gender justice for over 40 years – and for paid family and medical leave for most of them. I am before you today in support of LD 1964, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program. We thank Senator Daughtry and Representative Cloutier for shepherding this work for so long.

**Care work is the invisible underpinning of our economy.** Care work - the paid or unpaid work of looking after the physical, emotional, and developmental needs of others - is also highly gendered, and 85% of Maine caregivers are women.

Unpaid family care work seems “free,” so it gets left out of many policy conversations. But care work comes at a cost, including caregivers’ and parents’ ability to fully participate in the workplace, save for retirement, find time to give back to our communities, and do what they need to for their families. This **unpaid care labor means women are more likely to work part-time or to leave the workforce altogether, limiting their ability to access health insurance or save for retirement, and reducing Social Security benefits in later life.**

Here’s how it works: families need care, whether that is tending to new babies or caring for dying parents. Most of that care is provided by women in our culture. The added burden disrupts their work life, and because most companies don’t have policies to accommodate this, so **caregivers forego their incomes (destabilizing family economic security), or leave their jobs, or work less than they would otherwise – destabilizing the workforce.**

In fact, the burden of this unpaid care, without a policy solution, has meant that women’s jobs represent 75 percent of pandemic related job losses<sup>1</sup>, and **women’s participation in the workforce is at its lowest point in over 30 years<sup>2</sup>.**

A systemic failure to invest in caregiving infrastructure such as Paid Family and Medical Leave and childcare is now showing up in a destabilized work force. Families do not have the income they need, and employers do not have the workers they need, because **we have built an economy that fails to recognize that almost no one can raise a family on a single income, and all families need time for care.**

The good news is, there is a solution. Paid Family and Medical Leave policies – plans just like this one – have been repeatedly shown for years to improve the lives of families \*and\* the workforce – by allowing caregivers to take the time they need, and then come back. Many states

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<sup>1</sup> National Women’s Law Center (2022). Women Gain 83% of Jobs While 170,000 Women Leave Labor Force in June. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/June-Jobs-Day.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> National Women’s Law center. (2023). Another 275,000 Women Left the Workforce in January. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/resource/january-jobs-day-2021/>

have now implemented PFML, and the evidence is overwhelming: this program works to shore up families and the workforce:

- **Women with PFML are 20 percent more likely to be in the workforce** one year after having a baby, and 50 percent more likely five years after.<sup>3</sup>
- It **significantly decreases turnover costs for small businesses**, because employees are more likely to return to their jobs after paid leave.<sup>4</sup>
- It **improves family economic stability**, women's retirement savings, and evens out the gender- and race-pay gap.<sup>5</sup>
- It **improves overall health of the population**, by increasing rates of breastfeeding, bonding, family care, aging in place, vaccinations, and more – which means that the state's investment comes back.<sup>6</sup>

**Those opposing this bill point to the cost as the reason to slow down or do less.**

**But this plan presents costs shared across our community – just like any insurance program – less than 50 cents per \$100 of wages.**

For too long, the cost burden of caregiving has fallen on women, who sacrifice careers, physical and mental health, financial security, and retirement savings to support their families.

**Choosing not to act is choosing to continue passing the costs of inaction on to individuals to bear alone**, and to the small businesses who choose to continue to offer this vital benefit out of their own pockets because they know it is the right thing to do.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



**Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director**

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<sup>3</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2020). New Study Reveals Paid Family Leave Policies Lead to 20 Percent Fewer Women Leaving the Workforce. Retrieved from <https://iwpr.org/media/press-releases/new-study-reveals-paid-family-leave-policies-lead-to-20-fewer-women-leaving-the-workforce/>

<sup>4</sup> Nadeau et al. (2017). Paid Sick Days and Paid Family and Medical Leave Are Not Job Killers. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/paid-sick-days-and-paid-family-and-medical-leave-are-not-job-killers/>

<sup>5</sup> Bipartisan Policy center. (2021). Paid Family Leave Can Help Close the Gender Pay Gap. Retrieved from <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/blog/paid-family-leave-can-help-close-the-gender-pay-gap/>

<sup>6</sup> CNN. (2016). The benefits of paid leave for children are real, majority of research says. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2015/10/29/health/paid-leave-benefits-to-children-research/index.html>