



March 1, 2021

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Sylvester, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, with a focus on the most marginalized populations and communities.

We write today **in support of LD 447, An Act To Require Equivalent Paid Parental Leave for All Parents Employed by Companies Offering Paid Parental Leave**. We thank Representative Roeder for sponsoring this bill.

Though many Mainers are not able to access parental leave - indeed, only about 15 percent of people have access to paid family and medical leave¹ - we know that parents and children thrive when caregivers don't need to choose between their families and their economic security. Parental leave is an opportunity to bond as a family, to address healthcare needs or recovery from birth, to establish breastfeeding, or to address a wide range of essential needs following the arrival of a new child, however it has joined the family.

§848-A (1) clarifies that leave should be gender-equitable; If employees are entitled to leave, employers may not discriminate based on gender identity. This protection likely already exists in the Maine Human Rights Act, though the inclusion of this section in labor standards, and the accompanying penalty, **§848-A (2)**, offers additional incentive to ensure employers do not discriminate based on sex or gender.

§843, subsection 4-C clarifies that both birth or placement for adoption are ways that Mainers grow their families, and both should be eligible for parental leave. **§848-A (1)** further goes on to indicate that whether families grow through birth or adoption, parental leave should be equivalent, which ensures that families do not have tiered access to parental leave. This is an essential step forward for Mainers who choose to (or who must) begin or expand their families through adoption.

That said, we understand that there is currently a bill being supported by the Maine Human Rights Commission which would make 'familial status' a protected class within employment, which would meet the goal of this section more broadly. We support this comprehensive proposal to protect Mainers of all family types from discrimination in employment and support that effort. We would encourage the committee to hold this bill to ensure that the comprehensive fix is in place.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2017.



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

While we support this bill and believe it is a step forward for those Mainers who do currently have access to parental leave, we continue to champion the creation of a statewide system of paid family and medical leave for Maine, one that ensures all Mainers have access to paid leave regardless of income level, employer size, birth or adoption, gender identity, or any other factor. We are not alone: a recent survey indicated that over 75 percent of Mainers want to see the establishment of such a system in Maine². Until we invest in a statewide approach, we will continue to have a system where Mainers must choose between their family and their economic security.

We hope you will vote 'ought to pass' on LD 447.

Signed,
Maine Women's Lobby

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
Maine Women's Lobby / mainewomen.org

² Pan Atlantic Research. 56th Omnibus Poll, October 2020.