

April 19, 2019

Committee on Labor and Housing
Sen. Shenna Bellows, Chair
Rep. Mike Sylvester, Chair

Sen. Bellows, Rep. Sylvester, and members of the Committee on Labor and Housing:

My name is Kelli Whitlock Burton and I live in Waldoboro. I come before you today in support of LD 1410, An Act To Create Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits. I speak not just as a Maine resident who would benefit from this legislation, but also as co-leader of Suit Up Maine, an all-volunteer, progressive, grassroots group whose mission is to help create and foster a more informed and engaged electorate. Our membership of 5,400 Mainers includes business owners, self-employed individuals such as myself, staff workers, and retirees. We are parents and future parents, caregivers and future caregivers, patients and future patients. And like 85% of the U.S.,¹ we support the creation of a paid family and medical leave system.

Many of our members are parents of young children, caregivers for elderly loved ones, or both. Some have had to take unpaid leave following the birth of a child or have had to return to work earlier than doctor-recommended due to lack of salary. Some have even postponed having a child due to a lack of paid leave and a number expect to be caregivers for an elderly relative in the future. Among our membership are small business owners, independent contractors, and people who work for multiple employers, all of whom support the opt-in provision of LD 1410.

That provision is of particular interest to me. While I am fortunate to earn a good income as a freelance medical and science writer, if I don't work, I don't get paid. Our children are grown, but I am 50 and my husband is 64. We are acutely aware of the likelihood of age-related illness and the inevitability of needed time off to care for ourselves and each other in the years ahead. The ability to opt-in to the proposed paid family and medical leave plan would allow me to continue doing the work I love with the knowledge that my paychecks would continue if I need to take off for illness or to care for my husband.

As a science writer, I felt compelled to do some research on my own before choosing to support this legislation. What I found only strengthened my belief that paid family and medical leave will benefit Maine by improving the health of its populace and helping to grow and maintain a vital workforce. Some data points of interest:

- Countries that implemented paid family leave report a 10% decrease in infant mortality.²

¹ Pew Research Center; <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/03/23/americans-widely-support-paid-family-and-medical-leave-but-differ-over-specific-policies/>

² Public Health Reports; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150137/>

- 178,000 Mainers care for an elderly spouse, family member, or loved one, providing 165 million hours of care.³
- 49% of Mainers are current or former caregivers of elderly loved ones and 53% expect to be in the future.⁴
- Nearly 15% of Americans who received no pay or partial pay while on family or medical leave in 2012 turned to public assistance programs to make ends meet.⁵
- Looking to other states that offer similar plans, 87% of employers in California report no increased costs as a result of that state's paid family leave law. 9% say the law actually reduced their costs by decreasing employee turnover.⁶

LD 1410 would cover 95% of private sector employees in Maine, including many who currently lack access to even unpaid family leave. This fact alone will help to attract entrepreneurs and young families for whom the fear of lost wages during illness or following childbirth is a barrier to starting a business or a family. Establishing a paid family and medical leave program signals the state's concern for its residents' well being and happiness and an understanding of our aging population. It demonstrates our willingness to try innovative approaches to solving the challenges families face today and those that await us all with age. I urge you to support LD 1410. Thank you.

Kelli Whitlock Burton
 Waldoboro
 Co-Leader, Suit Up Maine

³ AARP; <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2015/valuing-the-invaluable-2015-update-new.pdf#page=19>

⁴ AARP of Maine; <http://mainebeacon.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ME-Caregiving-Survey-Infographic.jpg>

⁵ U.S. Department of Labor; <https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/fmla/FMLA-2012-Technical-Report.pdf>

⁶ National Partnership for Women and Families; <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/paid-leave-good-for-business.pdf>