

Committee on Labor and Housing  
c/o Alyssa Thompson, Committee Clerk  
Cross Building, Room 202  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 1559: *Resolve, To Create the Commission To Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program*

Dear Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and other members of the Committee on Labor and Housing,

We represent NASW Maine in support of LD 1559. The 5,000 social workers in Maine provide substantial support to family caregivers, the elderly, and disabled Mainers. We believe that Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) is a key component to a secure economic infrastructure, critical to the stability of families, and essential to the development and protection of children and adults. PFML is a gender and racial equity issue. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, in 2015 women earned 80 percent of men's median annual earnings. This pay gap is even more considerable for people of color. A structural contributor to this inequity is women's role as the primary caregiver for children, disabled adults, and the elderly (Hegewisch & DuMonthier, 2016).

Today, our testimony focuses on the caregiving needs for our disabled and our elderly Mainers. Key points to consider include:

- Caregiving of these populations has been valued at \$450 billion per year in the U.S. but is usually uncompensated – placing significant physical, emotional, and financial stress on families (Feinberg, et al. I, 2011; National Alliance on Caregiving, 2009)
- More than one in ten workers end up leaving the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities (Fahle, 2018)
- Women who drop out of the workforce early to provide care lose an average of \$324,000 in lifetime earnings, social security, and pension benefits (Metlife, 2011)

One of Julie's closest friends died of early Alzheimers at the age of 52. His wife, Nancy, became the sole family bread-winner, at a time where he had fluctuating needs and his adult children were going off to college. Over the 7 years before his death, Nancy was recruiting friend, family and paid caregivers and a nursing home who fired him after two months due to his aggressive and "eloping" behaviors. Nancy could not have kept her much-needed job to pay for most of these non-insurable costs without PFML.

One of Kerstin's coworkers had a son who was hospitalized for a month with a brain infection, with subsequent weeks in a rehab hospital and more weeks of intense therapy at home. She writes that "in the event that he requires care and/or increasing assistance due to the lasting effects of the resulting brain injury, having the assurance of the job protection that the Family Medical Leave Act provides to workers is critical to my peace of mind." She and Nancy are among the lucky few who have PFML.

LD 1559 will be a step to thoughtfully develop a robust PFML system in Maine to help reduce racial and gender inequities, prevent unemployment and poverty, and shore up Maine's economy, women and families.

We urge you all to vote "yes" on LD 1559.

Respectfully submitted,

Julie M. Schirmer, LCSW  
Co-Chair, Policy Committee, NASW ME  
NASW Maine  
[jschirme4@gmail.com](mailto:jschirme4@gmail.com)

Kerstin Kirchner  
Member, Policy Committee  
NASW Maine  
[kerstinkrchnr@gmail.com](mailto:kerstinkrchnr@gmail.com)

Exact References:

Hegewisch, A., & DuMontheir, A. (2016). The gender wage gap: 2015; annual earnings differences by gender, race and ethnicity. Retrieved from: <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/the-gender-wage-gap-2015-annual-earnings-differences-by-gender-race-and-ethnicity>

National Alliance on Caregiving (with AARP). (2009). Caregiving in the U.S. 2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.caregiving.org/pdf/research/Caregiving-in-the-US-2009-full-report.pdf>

Fahle, S. F., & McGarry, K. M. (2018). Women Working Longer: Increased Employment at Older Ages. University of Chicago Press. Retrieved from: <https://www.nber.org/system/files/chapters/c13800/c13800.pdf>

MetLife. (2011). Caregiving Costs to Working Caregivers. Retrieved from: <https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/mmi-caregiving-costs-working-caregivers.pdf>

Rainville, Chuck, Laura Skufca, and Laura Mehegan. Family Caregiving and Out-of-Pocket Costs: 2016 Report. Washington, DC: AARP Research, November 2016. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00138.001>.