



**Maryland General Assembly Senate Finance Committee Hearing Time to Care Act  
Senate Bill 0275 - Favorable  
February 8, 2022**

**Testimony of Molly Moon Neitzel  
Owner, Molly Moon's Homemade Ice Cream, Seattle WA**

Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the need to invest in care infrastructure, including paid family and medical leave.

My name is Molly Moon Neitzel. I own Molly Moon's Homemade Ice Cream in Seattle. I'm a mom to two amazing girls – 9 and 4 years old – and a founding member of Main Street Alliance, a national network of small business owners building community-focused, people-centered small businesses for local economies.

I launched my business in 2008 committed to building a profitable entity that reflects my values. In 2013, I gave birth to our first daughter. After taking 12 weeks of leave, I gained a newfound appreciation of how hard it is to care for a new child. After much research, I decided to provide 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave to all my employees.

Given limited, costly private insurance options, I assumed all costs of paid leave and replacement work. But the benefits soon became evident. We retained valued staff and recruited talented managers who wanted benefits competitive with what larger companies offer. But many smaller businesses can't afford to provide paid leave on their own. So, I was an early supporter of Washington State's paid leave bill, passed in 2017.

Our company's total premium costs for the state program are less than what it cost us to cover a 12-week leave for one management employee on our own. Since the state benefits are capped, I now just 'top off' employees' paychecks so they get full pay while on leave.

Before the pandemic, Molly Moon's had eight locations, with up to 150 employees in summer. Then came COVID. We closed fully for 6 weeks and laid off almost all our employees, including my own father. Then we gradually reopened for takeout. In that period, we lost 97% of our retail income. I feared losing my company, our house, and life savings.

When we saw we'd need to close, I wrote to our elected officials, pleading for higher unemployment benefits closer to true wages for our workers.

We had to make real sacrifices. My husband sold his coffee shop to limit our debt and stay home with our girls while schools were closed, so I could work to save my company. During this time, our daughter was diagnosed with autism and ADHD – stressful diagnoses with time consuming therapies.



My choices were difficult, but many of my staff had fewer resources and even more challenges. One employee used to own a commercial cleaning business. She had 30 workers before being wiped out by a property management merger of the office buildings that were her major clients. She took a job at Molly Moon's before the pandemic. When we had to lay her off, she got by on unemployment insurance, then started working part-time at a big box store.

A single mom of a teenager and 11-year old quadruplets, she was juggling so much. We told her about the Families First Coronavirus Emergency Response Act (FFCRA) – the first national paid leave program – and worked out a schedule so she could use the benefits while holding down two jobs and doing remote school with the quads. Then she was diagnosed with double carpal tunnel syndrome. Our state paid leave covered her wages during her surgery and recovery. She wasn't given any paid leave by her big-box employer - for the pandemic related school closures or the surgeries -- showing the need for a national minimum standard.

Two other employees of ours – single moms – used FFCRA while their kids were doing remote learning. One of our managers had a baby in 2020 and took state paid leave. We then offered her FFCRA when her parents couldn't watch the baby due to COVID risk. And our Director of Finance and HR moved her elderly mother with dementia in with her. She is able to use state paid leave when needed.

It has ultimately taken our company policies, my innovative HR Director, the state paid leave program and FFCRA to patch together a caregiving response that kept these highly valued employees connected to Molly Moon's. Far too many other small business owners and employees never found out about FFCRA and did not have a state or company program. To make matters worse, Congress let FFCRA expire last September with the pandemic still nowhere near being over. And the President's Build Back Better agenda that includes a national, permanent paid leave program is stalled in the U.S. Senate.

COVID has exposed large gaps in critical infrastructure for small business. The toll on women and BIPOC small business owners and their families is especially stark. It has shown more clearly than ever that we desperately need to improve our caregiving infrastructure across the country -- from paid family and medical leave to child and elder care.

Thank you for your time and attention.

*molly moon's*

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