

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore, a group of individuals working to move white folks as part of a multi-racial movement for equity and racial justice in Baltimore City and Baltimore County. We are also working in collaboration with Out for Justice. I am a resident of District 40. **I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 275 (Time to Care Act of 2022).**

In the past month, I lost my Grandma Barbara. My grandma was a special person. She loved bells, had the most thorough skin-care regimen of anyone I know, and she had sharp edges that hid her warm heart underneath. She'd roll her eyes when my sisters would buy a new dog (Chloe) and the next week Chloe would be over her house grandma she didn't want Chloe to be alone while we were at school. After she passed, we discovered my mother's 1st grade report card with a teacher's comment about her distracting another student (Susan) in class, followed by a defiant rebuttal by my grandmother explaining all the ways Susan was actually the problem child. She suffered no fools, but she wouldn't let fools suffer.

Grandma spent her last three weeks of life in a hospital suffering from medical complications due to dementia. My grandpa, mother, father, aunts, uncle, and sisters did everything they could to minimize the amount of time she would spend alone, while struggling with the emotional weight of that fact that they were functionally strangers to her at this point. This took a massive toll on us with our holiday festivities interspersed with tear-filled lamentations that my grandma might die alone. As the only person without a job, my 90-year-old grandfather spent the biggest share of time taking care of her, visit for several hours a day between two to three visits daily. In just three weeks, the stress, grief, and significant time spent shuttling between home and hospital caused him to lose 20 pounds. We were so worried that bearing the weight of my grandma's life would be the cause of my grandpa's death. Only in the cruelest and uncaring systems would set up a situation where one has to weigh the value of one grandparent's life against the other, yet without the availability of a paid medical family program that'd allow us to bear a greater share grandma's care, our family was left to wonder whether the best thing for my grandpa would be the death of my grandma.

The Time to Care Act establishes a Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program so employees could take up to 12 weeks of paid leave from work to care for the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child, care for themselves or family members with serious health or medical conditions, or address needs resulting from a military family member's deployment. The program must be funded equally by employees and employers with a 0.75% mandatory contribution each pay period, split evenly between the two (0.375% each) with employees having the right to opt-in/opt-out of the program.

At some point, most of us will need a paid family Leave policy to care for new babies, aging parents, loved ones with health needs or disabilities, or for ourselves. Yet many Marylanders can't take time to care for their family members because they lack paid family leave. In fact, only 23% of civilian workers have access to paid family leave according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Unpaid leave forces too many Americans—especially those whose needs are the greatest—to choose between income and family when illness strikes, when new babies arrive, or when the needs of a family member with a disability intensify. Nearly 25% of women, for example, take ten or fewer days of parental leave, potentially putting themselves and their children at risk physically and emotionally.

Government-guaranteed paid family leave is not a unique or exceptional policy. According to the UCLA World Policy Analysis Centre, countries all over the world provide some forms of maternity or family medical leave, including Canada, the Russia, United Kingdom, and Iran. Providing leave at the state-level family medical leave isn't even new with California, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia having declared paid leave plans a right for some or all private workers.

Legislation establishing a Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program would make paid leave available to Maryland workers for up to 12 weeks following the birth or adoption of a child, and when needed to provide care for a family member or oneself. The leave would be funded through an insurance pool, into which workers and their employers contribute. This is an exceedingly popular program with 88% of Maryland residents across political affiliation supporting paid family and medical leave according to a poll done by Time to Care Maryland.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote in support of Senate Bill 275 (Time to Care Act of 2022).

Sincerely,
Jonathan Smeton
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Showing Up for Racial Justice Baltimore

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