

April 4, 2025



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TESTIMONY ON HB 102 – POSITION: FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENTS

Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Revisions

TO: Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee

FROM: Sarah Hiller, on behalf of Jews United for Justice

My name is Sarah Hiller, and I am a resident of District 40. I work at Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), which organizes over 6,000 Jews and allies in support of social, racial, and economic justice. We support HB 102, which would make several technical revisions to the state's Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program. However, **we oppose the bill's proposed**

18-month delay in implementation and urge the removal of this provision.

Marylanders can't wait any longer for the ability to take time to care for themselves or their loved ones at the risk of losing their jobs.

During my time studying abroad in Stockholm, Sweden, I had a conversation with a professor about the stark contrast in family policies between the US and Sweden. Raised in Sweden but having met his wife while in university in the US, he and his wife chose to return to Sweden to start their family because of paid parental leave and government-funded childcare services. He told me, with no sarcasm, "I don't know how people have children in the US." His disbelief highlighted a painful truth: the US lacks the family-friendly policies that make parenting, and all caregiving, more manageable.

In an unfortunate but full-circle situation, good friends of mine – fellow District 40 residents with an 18-month-old – are now seriously considering moving from Maryland to Sweden, explicitly because they are finding it so impossible to have and raise a child here. After a difficult pregnancy and the premature birth of their daughter, the mother remained in the hospital while their newborn spent weeks in the NICU. Meanwhile, the father had no choice but to work from the hospital to be with his wife and newborn, as he could not take time off. He was fortunate to have the option to work remotely – a luxury not all families or workers have. This is the reality that the FAMLI program was meant to address. Maryland families cannot afford another delay before its implementation.

At a time of significant financial uncertainty spurred by actions of the new federal administration, Maryland leaders must reject delays to the FAML I program, as its timely implementation would provide crucial stability for Maryland workers and their families. The proposed delay will harm hundreds of thousands of families, caretakers, service members, and Marylanders going through a medical crisis. According to the latest actuarial study commissioned by the Maryland Department of Labor, it's anticipated that the FAML I program will receive over 165,000 claims in its first year, just shy of 14,000 claims a month. Consequently, an 18-month delay in implementation means that over 247,000 Marylanders, who would have had access to paid leave if the program was implemented on time, will instead have to make impossible choices between caring for themselves and their loved ones or maintaining their income and paying their bills.

Every day the implementation of FAML I is delayed, Maryland families needlessly fall into poverty without access to paid leave. When families have nowhere else to turn for support, Maryland will bear these costs through spending in our state's safety-net programs. As it stands, the FAML I program has already been delayed twice, and each year the programmatic implementation gets further delayed, other states pass and implement their own FAML I programs, leaving Marylanders behind. Three states that passed paid leave legislation after Maryland – Delaware, Minnesota, and Maine – will fully implement their programs before Maryland does, and none of these states are delaying their implementation due to “federal uncertainty.” Just last month, the Minnesota legislature rejected a proposal to delay the implementation of their program. Life's joys and tragedies don't wait, and it's a broken promise to ask hardworking Marylanders to delay their ability to care for themselves and their families.

On behalf of JUFJ, I urge the committee to issue a Favorable with Amendments report on HB 102.

Thank you for your consideration,