

Chairman Davis and Honorable Members of the Committee,

My name is Susan Johnson and I am here today, along with my family, to urge you to amend the definition of family members in the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act to include:

- Legal wards of an employee or employee's spouse
- Legal guardians of an employee's spouse

My husband, Ed, is the Court appointed Guardian of the Person for Mr. Tom Mills, an 81 year old family friend, who has a lifelong cognitive disability and no other family left to care for him. Ed has been Tom's primary caregiver for nearly twenty years and I have been Tom's co-primary caregiver for over ten years. We all live together, along with our nine year old son, on our farm in Frederick County and are very much a family unit.

In 2018, Tom was diagnosed with cancer, which required numerous medical appointments followed by five weeks of radiation every Monday thru Friday. My husband is sole proprietor of a small business and is generally unable to take off during the day to take to take Tom to his appointments without it wreaking financial havoc for our family. I sought help from my employer, Frederick Community College, where I have been an exemplary professor for over twenty years, to see if there was a way for me to use about 50 hours of my own sick leave (I have nearly 1,000 hours) to take off a couple of hours each day to take Tom to his radiation treatments. My request was denied. As a faculty member we do not get vacation or personal days. My employer made it clear that should I miss work to care for Tom I would be subject to termination for taking unauthorized absences. The prospect of learning I could lose my job in order to care for my husband's legal ward was gut wrenching and left me panic-stricken. My employer has no desire to change our College policies to be more inclusive of modern family or Court ordered relationships and, in fact, has been stripping away our sick leave benefits over the last five years.

My family and I had hoped the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act's more inclusive definition of family members might include legal guardians or their spouses to care for their wards but, oddly, the definition only covers employees to use the sick leave allotment to care for legal guardians. That does not mirror FMLA, which has a provision for legal wards of employees, leading me to think there was a possible error in the language of the existing Maryland law.

Please consider broadening the definition of family to include legal wards of an employee and legal wards of employee spouses so that caregivers, like me, are not forced to choose between their job or caring for someone they or their spouse have a legal obligation to provide care for.

Thank you very much for your consideration of House Bill 0880 and thank you for your service to the citizens of Maryland.

Sincerely,

Susan L Johnson  
4752 Broad Run Rd  
Jefferson, MD 21755  
240-626-1051