

**Testimony in Support of Time to Care-- A Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program
HB 839 and SB 539**

Heather Kangas LCSW-C February 2020

My name is Heather Kangas. I am a Baltimore City resident and reside at 328 S Poppleton St Baltimore MD 21230 in the Pigtown neighborhood. I work as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW-C) within walking distance from my home at a large, academic medical center. I have practiced as a medical social worker since 2014. During my career, I have worked on inpatient geriatric psychiatry, the adult and pediatric emergency department and now work with employees of the hospital.

I support the Time to Care Act, which establishes a Family and Medical Leave Insurance program through which employees may take up to 12 weeks of paid leave from their jobs to care for new children, other family members with serious health conditions or disabilities, or themselves.

I have witnessed many families and patients make sacrifices to their health because they do not have paid family leave. I have witnessed patients leave the hospital against medical advice for fear of missing a day of wages or being fired. I have also seen financially stressed employees attempt to return to work when they are still sick, injured or recovering. While on geriatric psychiatry, many of my patients had dementia and required constant supervision or placement at a skilled nursing facility or assisted living. Many families could not find time in their week to leave work and tour these facilities. Sometimes families would feel overwhelmed with discharge plans and follow-up appointments (psychiatric providers as well as adult day care and medical providers) that required them to be available in the middle of the day. While in the ED, I saw many pediatric patients with psychiatric and behavioral health issues. By law, parents have to come to the ED for their children to receive a psychiatric assessment and are required to be present for admission. Once children are admitted for psychiatric treatment, parents must be available for treatment team meetings and phone calls. This often makes parents have to miss work on multiple days and puts them in jeopardy of losing their jobs. These are not fair choices and it sets families up to fail.

I also recently had a colleague who works fulltime at my same institution write asking for a donation of vacation days. She had used all of her paid and unpaid leave to care for her sick 3 year old. She was desperate and exhausted and trying to balance a fulltime job.

Paid leave means that families do not have to choose between health care and employment. Families can give their full attention to the care of themselves and their loved ones instead of being expected to juggle both without adequate resources.

Thank you for your consideration. I urge establishment of paid family and medical leave in Maryland.

Respectfully,

Heather Kangas, LCSW-C