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SB 539

Labor and Employment

Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – “Time to Care Act of 2020”

Hearing of the Senate Finance Committee, February 27, 2020

Position: FAVORABLE

The Public Justice Center (PJC) is a not-for-profit civil rights and anti-poverty legal services organization which seeks to advance social justice, economic and racial equity, and fundamental human rights in Maryland. Our Workplace Justice Project works to expand and enforce the right of low-wage workers to receive an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work. The PJC **SUPPORTS SB 539** and requests a **FAVORABLE** report.

Marylanders Need Time to Care for Serious Health Issues and Major Life Events.

We all need time to care—for new babies, for aging parents, for loved ones with serious health needs or disabilities, or for ourselves. While many Marylanders can now earn short-term earned leave under the Healthy Working Families Act (HWFA), that law does not help the thousands of Marylanders with longer-term health issues or with major life events, such as birth or adoption. In fact, in Maryland, even *unpaid* leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 56 percent of working people.¹ Moreover, without paid leave, many of those covered by FMLA cannot afford to take it. Marylanders need a paid family leave program.

SB 539 represents a common-sense solution to the very real struggles of working families.

SB 539 is a common-sense solution that would allow Maryland workers up to 12 weeks of leave 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 both workers and their employers would contribute. Unlike unemployment insurance, the cost of SB 539 would be shared equally by employees, and not be borne exclusively by employers.

¹ Nat’l Partnership for Women and Families, “Paid Leave Means a Stronger Maryland” Fact Sheet (2020), <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/paid-leave-means-a-stronger-maryland.pdf>. *The Public Justice Center is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such does not endorse or oppose any political party or candidate for elected office.*

SB 539 Appropriately Recognizes that Low-Wage Workers Need Maximum Wage Replacement. In addition to sensibly splitting contributions between employers and employees, SB 539's graduated wage replacement recognizes that lower-wage employees would be unable to afford to take leave absent nearly full wage replacement. Allowing up to 90% wage replacement for the lowest-paid Marylanders will ensure that the program is accessible to those who could otherwise not afford to participate.

Paid Family Leave is Good for the Economy and Good for Business. Paid family leave is not just good for families. Employees who know that they don't have to worry about taking time to care for a new child or a loved one with a serious illness are more productive and more loyal. And businesses thrive when employees are more productive.

For the foregoing reasons, the PJC **SUPPORTS SB 539** and urges a **FAVORABLE** report. Should you have any questions, please call Sally Dworak-Fisher at 410-625-9409 ext. 273.