



Welfare Advocates

Founded 1979

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Senate Bill 539 Labor and Employment- Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program- Establishment

Senate Finance Committee
February 27, 2020

Support

Welfare Advocates is a statewide coalition of social service organizations, advocacy groups, faith communities, and community members, whose mission it is to educate ourselves, and the wider community and to advocate for an adequate safety net and public policies that support families moving towards economic stability.

Welfare Advocates supports SB 539, which would establish a Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program in Maryland. This program allows families to take up to 12 weeks of paid leave to care for new children, family members with serious health conditions or disabilities, family members who are leaving for military deployment, or for their own health conditions.

The need to take time off is universal, but the ability to do so is not. The vast majority of employees in the U.S. do not have access to paid family leave.ⁱ SB 539 would be particularly beneficial to low-wage workers who disproportionately lack access to this vital benefit. For low-income families, just a few days of lost pay is equivalent to an entire month's grocery budget or rent payment. Implementing a paid family leave program – especially with a progressive pay structure as proposed in SB 539 – increases the health and financial security of Marylanders living in or near poverty.

No one should have to choose between caring for a loved one or paying the bills. FAMLI provides a safety-net for workers in unexpected circumstances. This bill would allow workers to comfort a dying parent, care for a newborn or adoptive child, or care for themselves during an unexpected illness. Low-wage workers typically have to face tradeoffs by forgoing wages and job security to take time off to care for their families. Broadening the scope of who can access this benefit also reduces the likelihood that low-income Marylanders will need to access safety-net programs – such as TCA or SNAP – if they are able to access paid leave.

Access to paid leave is a racial justice issue. People of color on average earn significantly less than white workersⁱⁱ and women of color in particular are more likely to be the breadwinner as well as caregiver for their familiesⁱⁱⁱ. Economic disparities make it harder for families of color to absorb financial emergencies, which in turn magnify their need for paid family leave. SB 539 presents an opportunity to improve racial equity in the workforce and in our communities.

For the reasons stated above, we respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 539.

Submitted by Lisa Klingenmaier

ⁱ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018, September). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2018*. <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2018/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2018.pdf>;

ⁱⁱ The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/12/2018_pfmliscriticalfor_0.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ National Partnership for Women and Families. <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>
