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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB539

Labor and Employment - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program - Establishment

TO: Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Lisa Firnberg

My name is Lisa Firnberg, and I have lived and voted in Baltimore City since I moved to Maryland for college 18 years ago. I currently live in District 43. I have established my family roots here, and I submit this testimony in support of SB539 - the Time to Care Act.

When I gave birth to my daughter three years ago, I was relatively lucky. I had an easy pregnancy, an uncomplicated c-section, and my daughter spent just a few hours in the NICU to ensure her steady breathing. I was also lucky professionally. My employer supported my taking maternity leave, and assured me that my job would be waiting for me when I returned. It's a good thing, because I was the primary breadwinner for my family.

But what income would I have while I cared for my newborn baby? First, I made a claim to my short term disability policy, the premium for which I paid myself. That got me a few weeks to recover from major surgery. Then I used up most of my paid vacation and sick time. That got me a few more weeks. Then I dug into my savings and took a few weeks of unpaid time, which I was lucky to be able to afford.

I did okay. But too many other parents' stories are much, much different. **Someone's ability to care for their newborn baby during their first few months of life, a period often called "the fourth trimester," should not be subject to the generosity of their employer's leave policies, or their socioeconomic status.** The waitress working shifts at three different restaurants, the custodian cleaning office buildings at night, and the childcare worker who devotes her career to caring for all of our children, also need Time to Care - but for them, it is too often out of reach. I am horrified to know that they don't have the same choices, the same privilege, that I had when my child needed me.

This bill will benefit all of us who, at some point in our lives, will need to care for our children, ourselves, or other loved ones. No one should have to choose between caring for their family and keeping a roof over their heads and food on the table. We must debunk the myth that businesses cannot afford this. An insurance fund means that employees taking time off are paid by the fund, so employers can afford to pay others overtime or bring in temporary workers while their employee is out. Everybody wins: employers keep their experienced employees on staff, which reduces turnover costs; children and other ailing family members get the care they need; and most importantly, families don't fall apart.

Nine other states and the District of Columbia have passed Paid Family and Medical Leave programs. **The United States is one of two countries in the world without any paid maternity leave** policy - and we have worse health outcomes to show for it. You can make Maryland a place that honors the importance of family, while also doing what's right for our economy and the health of everyone who lives here. **I urge you to support SB539.**