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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 the members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Jill Alexander

My name is Jill Alexander. I am a resident of Rockville and District 17 and a 31-year resident of Montgomery County. This testimony is in support of SB539.

Jewish values regarding employment and health converge to support the need for the Time to Care Act. Withholding wages is akin to taking a person's life. *Pikuach Nefesh*, the principle that preserving human life overrides almost any other religious rule, indicates how important health and attending to it is. We must ensure that employees in Maryland are allowed to care for their families in times of need without forcing them to choose between health and wages by passing the Time to Care Act.

My daughter works as a therapist for children with behavioral and mental health issues from low-income families. Although for privacy reasons she cannot discuss individual cases, time and again she has made clear 1) the sacrifices families make to support their children's health and often, 2) the choice a parent must make to neglect a child's health because the alternative is to forego wages that translate to rent and food.

Imagine the single mother, Maria*, who works the night shift earning minimum wage, struggling to make ends meet. Her son, Joshua*, has been seeing a therapist who tells Maria that her son is suicidal and she needs to take him to a crisis center. Joshua is assessed and admitted to a Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP) during school hours and maybe even an Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) thereafter until 7pm because he needs a therapeutic environment and mental health support that school cannot provide. Maria needs to pick Joshua up from his program each day and remain with him throughout the night and whenever he is not in one of the programs. Joshua literally would be at risk of killing himself, if left unsupervised AT ALL. This could go on for weeks. Even a parent with plenty of support and resources would be panicked and afraid, but Maria's fear runs deeper. Does she miss work or even possibly lose her job, forgoing rent and food money, to care for Joshua? Or does she risk Joshua's life by "leaving [him] unattended where ... [he] is placed in substantial risk of harm," which could be considered child neglect according to the [Code of Maryland Regulations \(COMAR\)](#). No Maryland resident should have to answer that question, to make that "Sophie's Choice."

The Time to Care Act would allow Maria to focus on Joshua's recovery without worrying about losing income and potentially leaving her and her son without a home. **The replacement income from the public insurance fund might mean the difference between life and death for someone with a suicidal child or other critically ill family member.** Small contributions from BOTH employees and employers certainly ensure that the financial burden on everyone is light as compared to the benefit to Marylanders in dire circumstances.

You can help the Marias and Joshuas of Maryland by supporting the Time to Care Act, SB539. I respectfully urge a favorable report.

* The circumstances described comprise a composite of actual circumstances.