

Testimony in Support of SB 539 “Labor and Employment - Family and Medical
Leave Insurance Program - Establishment”
Submitted to the Senate Finance Committee

I am reaching out to your committee today to express my support of SB 539. I am a small business owner in Maryland. My business employs 46 workers, most in full-time positions. At the current time, all of my employees are female, and my industry, the childcare industry, is primarily female. As a small business, it is difficult for me to offer my employees the same benefits that they could obtain from larger companies. My employees choose to work for our company because they believe in our mission to care for children in a nature-based Christian environment. They are committed to the families and the 225 children we serve. I try to offer my employees benefits that we know they will need, including paid leave, incentives for wellness, and paid ongoing professional development. Most of my current workforce consists of women with young families, and in the last year five of our employees have given birth and taken leave to spend time with their newborn babies. In our industry, as in many businesses with lower wage employees, the women who act as the primary caregivers in their families do not make enough money to comfortably take extended leave without pay. I cannot afford to pay my employees during an extended leave while also paying another employee to substitute in that teacher's place while she is out of work. There are countless businesses throughout Maryland that find themselves in a similar situation, unable to support paid extended leave for the employees who may desperately need the time to care and bond with a newborn, or to care for sick family member or dying parent.

Employers know that our employees are the backbone of our businesses. The success or failure of our business is directly related to our ability to attract and retain quality employees who will drive our business forward. This bill offers a smart option for small businesses in Maryland. With minimal cost (New Jersey's current Family Leave Insurance Program costs employees an average of \$.60 per week) we can offer a portion of paid salary to our employees for family leave. This can be an attractive option for employees who are deciding whether to work in a small business or a larger corporation that has the resources to offer more paid benefits. Under the current proposed legislation, The Family and Medical Leave Insurance fund would be administered by the Unemployment department at the state level. Although there will likely be an application process for employees to access this benefit, I am happy to complete the application to help my employee access paid leave that I cannot afford to offer.

Families know that caregivers are the backbone of the family. All families will at one time or another need someone to take extra time to welcome a new baby or adopted child, to care for someone who is ill, or to take care of themselves in an illness. In households where finances are tight, unpaid leave is a huge burden during an already stressful time in the family's life. New mothers who must return to work without time to bond with their new babies risk medical problems for both themselves and their infants. In many cases, these are the at-risk children and families that our state is striving through countless other programs to reach and support. With this legislation, we could offer these families some support financially to feel that they can take the time they need to invest in the health of their family.

Studies in California, New Jersey and Rhode Island where similar state-wide paid leave programs have been implemented show that employers report little or no impact on the operation of their businesses with the implementation of this program. I am confident, however, that it has made all of the difference to the individuals who have benefitted from the program. Our workplaces, our economy, and our state are all built on the health of our families. It is my hope that you will consider the importance of supporting Maryland families in their neediest time by supporting this important piece of legislation.

I thank you in advance for your support of SB 539. The caregivers, mothers, sons, and daughters, husbands and wives of Maryland will thank you.

Lavonne Taylor, Owner/Director Forest Hill Nature Preschool & Childcare in Harford County Maryland