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Testimony of Ricarra Jones, Political Director of 1199SEIU
SB 539 – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program - Establishment
Position: SUPPORT
February 27, 2020

Dear Chairwoman Delores Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

1199SEIU Healthcare Workers East (1199SEIU) is the largest healthcare union in the country with, with over 450,000 members throughout Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Florida and Washington, D.C. **We fully support SB 539, which establishes a Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FMLI) program through which employees may take up to 12 weeks of paid leave from their jobs to care for new children, other family members with serious health conditions or disabilities, or themselves.**

Every day, the members of 1199SEIU save lives, deliver babies and care for the sick, seniors and people with disabilities. We are nurses, nurse aides, techs, lab workers, clerks, housekeepers, dietary workers, transporters, pharmacists, social workers and many other types of medical professionals. The members of 1199SEIU deserve to have the ability to also provide the care that is needed for their own family members, that could be related to the birth of a new child, an ill or disabled family member, family needs related to a service member's deployment, or their own serious health condition.

The United States is the only industrialized country that does not guarantee some form of paid family leave for workers. If Maryland passes this legislation, it would join either other states and the District of Columbia who already have paid family and medical leave laws on the books. It is important to note that none of these states have noted any significant issues with fraud or abuse of paid leave. In fact, evidence from California, New Jersey and Rhode Island – states with longstanding programs- indicates that abuse of paid leave is at best rare.

Finally, it is important to understand that no Marylander should have to be forced to choose between caring for family members and economic security. Without paid family leave, elders are dying alone; parents are struggling to care for their newborns, and families are confronting financial crisis because they lose income while they take on caregiving responsibilities. **We must do right by Maryland working families.**

For all of these reasons, we strongly urge the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report for Senate Bill 539.