

House Bill 375
Labor and Employment – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program –
Establishment

Economic Matters Committee
February 16, 2021

Support

Catholic Charities of Baltimore strongly supports HB 375, which provides wage replacement for Maryland workers who need to take time to care for themselves or a loved one.

Inspired by the gospel to love, serve and teach, Catholic Charities provides care and services to improve the lives of Marylanders in need. As the largest human service provider in Maryland working with tens of thousands of Marylanders each year, and an employer of over 2,000 people, we recognize the dignity of the worker and as part of that the need to take time to care for oneself and loved ones.

Each day, Catholic Charities staff interact with Marylanders facing challenges and difficulties. Whether it is a parent seeking job training, a youth experiencing a behavioral crisis or a senior who needs a safe place to live we work to meet the individual's needs and help them meet their goals. It is through these interactions that we have come to strongly support HB 375.

Shakira Hardy's story is just one example of the need we see every day. This excerpt is from our Winter 2020 *Blessings* newsletter.

THREE YEARS AGO, Shakira Hardy and her two children were a month away from homelessness. After her husband was incarcerated, her then-7-year-old son, Anthony, began acting out in ways that confounded educators and mental health professionals. He was suspended from school and hospitalized multiple times. She struggled to keep her job, focused on his needs and those of her then-10-year-old daughter, Aaliyah.

A year ago, Shakira was wrapping small Christmas presents in the cafeteria of a homeless shelter where she and Aaliyah were staying. She had lost her job – and then their home – and they had been kicked out of other shelters because of Anthony's behavior. But, after months of trying, she had secured a spot for him at St. Vincent's Villa – Catholic Charities' residential center for children with significant emotional and behavioral needs. As Anthony received comprehensive treatment, she concentrated on carving out a more stable path for her family...

...Through Baltimore City services, Shakira found Catholic Charities' Project REACH, which offers permanent housing and a path to independence. On June 1, she and Aaliyah moved into a three bedroom home in Baltimore, and Anthony joined them after finishing treatment at St. Vincent's. The holidays offer a chance for renewal, and Shakira pauses when asked about Christmas. "It's going to be the meaning behind it," she said, glancing at her children. "We're going to have our own house and put up our own tree the way we want it. But I'm just elated we'll be all together."

Paid family leave may not have solved all of the problems the Hardy family faced, but if Shakira had been able to take the time her family needed, they would have had a better chance of maintaining financial stability, kept their home, and prevented the family from experiencing the toxic stress associated with homelessness.

As individuals, we do not know if we will need to access family leave in the future. But as a society, we know that infants do better when a parent are present during their first 12 weeks, that seniors are more likely to age in place if their caregiver has access to leave, and that individuals have better health outcomes if they can take the

time to heal. And as an employer, we know that paid leave leads to improved morale and reduced turnover. It is time for Maryland to adopt a paid family and medical leave program.

On behalf of the families and all the individuals we work with, Catholic Charities of Baltimore appreciates your consideration, and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 375.

Submitted By: Regan K. Vaughan, Director of Advocacy