

COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

January 25, 2021

The Honorable Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Senate Finance Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Wing
James Senate Office Building, Room 223
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Letter in Support of SB 311 – Labor and Employment -
Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program -
Establishment (Time to Care Act of 2021)

Dear Chairman Kelley, Senator Feldman and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Montgomery County Commission for Women (“Commission”), we write to express our strong support for SB 311, the Time to Care Act of 2021, and urge this Committee to issue a favorable report on this bill. This bill establishes a Family and Medical Leave Insurance 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 conditions or disabilities, or themselves.

Our Commission is appointed by the County Executive to represent the interests of women in Montgomery County, who constitute more than half of its residents. Assuring the financial security of Montgomery County women throughout their lives is one of the Commission’s top strategic priorities. That is why paid family and medical leave is of such critical importance.

At some point, nearly everyone will need to time off from work to deal with a serious personal or family illness, or to care for a new child or elderly or

ailing parents. Yet many Marylanders and other Americans are unable to take this time off because they lack paid and medical family leave, forcing them to choose between their jobs, their paychecks and taking care of serious personal or family illnesses or family needs. In fact, in 2019, [more than 32 million people in the country – 27% of private sector workers](#) – lacked access **to a single paid sick day** to recover from an illness like COVID-19 or to care for a sick family member without losing their job or their paycheck.

Lack of paid leave especially hurts working mothers. In Maryland, 79% of mothers are in the workforce and families depend on them (and men) for caregiving. The lack of a paid family and medical leave system negatively affects women’s ability to work and, to advance their careers. **Nearly 25% of women take 10 or fewer days of parental leave, potentially putting them and their children at risk physically and emotionally.** Women also bear a disproportionate burden of caregiving for elderly and ill relatives. It is a major contributor to the wage gap between women and men, and to women’s financial vulnerability and poverty as they age.

As events of the last year have shown, lack of paid sick leave is risky to public health, especially during pandemics like COVID-19, which are increasingly common. Workers go to work sick because they can’t afford to lose pay, spreading contagion. A [survey of workers](#) found that those without paid sick leave were 1.5 times more likely to go to work when they have a contagious illness than workers with the benefit. [One study](#) of workers lacking sick leave found up to 3 million workers go to work sick every week, mostly low-wage workers, mothers with young children, or both. When workers go to work sick, contagious illnesses spread more quickly and widely.

Low-income and service-sector workers—who are disproportionately women—and Latinx workers -- are the least likely to have access to paid sick leave and are disproportionately represented in front-line industries where they face higher risks of exposure to the coronavirus, are least likely to have access to paid leave. Nearly 80 percent of low wage workers lack the ability to earn paid sick days.

New York, Washington, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Washington, D.C. and California have similar programs. Similar legislation was recently signed into law in Connecticut and Oregon.

The Commission urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on the bill and ease the plight of working families in Maryland.

Sincerely,



Nicole Y. Drew, Esq.
President
Montgomery County Commission for Women

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Diana Rubin – Second Vice President
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