



Public Testimony in Support of HB 496
Labor and Employment – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Establishment
February 15, 2022
Favorable

Dear Chairman Wilson and Honorable Members of the House Economic Matters Committee:

In addition to our organizational testimony in support of HB 496, the Time to Care Coalition and Strong Future Maryland are proud to present **the public comments of more than 40 Marylanders** from all over our state who strongly support this legislation. Many of them share their own experiences struggling with illness, caring for family members, uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic, starting a family, and more. The emotional, mental, and financial hardships they describe are heart wrenching, and not at all unique. The message is clear: Marylanders support HB 496 and are calling on the General Assembly to take action and establish paid family and medical leave this session.

Public Comment:

No one should have to choose between a) going to work to earn the money they need to pay rent and feed their family, and b) staying home to take care of family members who are sick or take care of themselves. This will not only help workers and their families, but it will also bolster the economy in Maryland.

Jo Shifrin, Montgomery County

Twice I have had to quit my teaching jobs to take care of elders in my family. These resignations hurt my career and my earning power. No Marylander should have to make the choice between earning and caring.

Susan Allen, Anne Arundel County

Because sometimes people need to stay home to take care of themselves or a family member, and not everyone can afford to do so without pay.

Sandy Bell, Calvert County

It is needed and the right thing to do.

Louis Rimbach, Wicomico County

Paid family leave is vital for the success of families and families are the basis of community. And community is the basic tenet that we all live together and need each other. My own family has benefitted from paid family leave. I believe that in an equitable community all persons,

regardless of race, gender orientation or anything else should have paid family leave and I appreciate that we will soon have it here in our beloved communities.

Donna Martin, Baltimore County

As a society, we can only benefit from the talents and contributions of everyone if we also support the need to care for our future generations (children) and those who need medical and eldercare. Too many talented individuals, especially women, are forced to choose between contributing to the world through their work/career or caring for family members in need.

Mary Gross, Montgomery County

I support paid family and medical leave because of the uncertain reality we all live in. In a second, I could become the main caretaker of my mother or mother-in-law because of their declining health or my husband or toddler due to an unexpected illness. The fact that I have to rely on my employer (who does not provide paid family and medical leave) instead of a state mandated system for when an emergency happens with my family is causing a deep fear in my heart. I do not always want to look over my shoulder and attempt to financially plan for my worst fear while also having to think about saving for other emergencies.

Deborah Euzebio, Prince George's County

People should not have to choose between their jobs and taking care of family members. A mother or father should not have to short change a new born or adopted child because they have to return to work.

Andre Thompson, Baltimore City

Too many Marylanders have to choose between their jobs and families, which contributes to significant economic, social, emotional and physical strain on workers, especially women. This is a choice many workers are forced to make is unacceptable. Paid family and medical leave is good for our economy, businesses, health and for families. I recognize the privilege I have had with the type of jobs that allowed me to work virtually and balance caring for family members who were recovering from surgery or short-term illnesses. And even with this level of flexibility, there are gaps in our existing policies. While the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides unpaid leave and important job protections, according to the National Partnership for Women & Families, FMLA is available to less than 60% of workers and many cannot afford to take it. This is why we need paid family and medical leave. This bill will allow workers to earn a portion of their wages while caring for a new child or parent or family member with a serious health condition. Maryland has an opportunity to lead with equity and to care for our workers who we relied upon heavily during this pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the frailties of our systems and the inequities that continue to grow. Marylanders need an equitable policy solution that will address this crisis. This bill provides a cost-effective solution, covers all and applies equally to men and women, provides 12-weeks of leave with a substantial share of usual wages and protects workers against adverse consequences for taking leave. This is the solution Marylanders need. Thank you for your consideration.

Jennifer White, Baltimore County

Absolutely necessary, should have been enacted by now.

Lisa Fuller, Montgomery County

I had to go back to work 6 weeks after having a c-section because there is no paid family and medical leave. I support this, so the same thing won't happen to my daughter when she starts a family. It is disgraceful that the U.S. is so behind on this issue.

Elana Pate, Montgomery County

All workers deserve paid time to support their family for new births or adoptions, and to care for themselves or family members when someone is ill.

Sally Murek, Montgomery County

When I had children, I had to use leave and luckily, I had enough to get me through. I had many colleagues however who did not and were forced to quit or come back before they or their family was ready. I have had colleagues who were unable to provide care for ill family members because they did not have enough paid leave.

Julianne Cardemil, Montgomery County

As a professional social worker, I believe that no one should have to choose between the job they need and the family they love.

Jonathan Lebolt, Prince George's County

It is important for families to have a stress-free healthy start.

Cheryl Knoppel-Hanlon, Baltimore County

I support paid family and medical leave because it is a necessity. It is vital for each working person to be able to take the time they need to care for a loved one without worrying that they will not be able to survive without any pay. The lack of appropriate policy puts many families and individuals at risk, and it also deters people from having children or expanding their families. A paid leave policy is long overdue, and I sincerely hope that it will be implemented soon.

Lynn Panepinto, Baltimore City

This is especially important for paid caregivers AND for those in need of care, including the elderly, people with disabilities, and those with serious health issues. Ironically, even at \$15/hr, wages are relatively low for paid caregivers and, at the same time, a huge expense for those in need of full-time care. When a paid caregiver needs an extended period of family or medical leave, this can be a financial hardship all the way around. Being able to participate in a State-run paid family leave program, into which employers and employees contribute, is especially important to Maryland's paid caregivers and for Marylanders in need of care.

Ann Sloane, Montgomery County

I am an Oncology Social Worker. I work with cancer patients and have a support group for caregivers. I support this legislation because working adults are often needed as caregivers to help with the symptoms of a loved one's illness, side effects of treatments, transportation to appointments, picking up medications, running errands, making meals and communication on behalf of the patients they care for. Most families do not have the funds to hire caregivers (nor are paid caregivers necessarily available since the pandemic). Family members know the patient best and are invaluable during visits with providers to obtain information and background. In my experience, patients whose family caregivers cannot take paid time off are more likely to miss appointments, less likely to complete needed treatments and experience more stress among family members that has repercussions for everyone. Having been a caregiver MYSELF for my elderly mother for 5 years, I know how stressful it is to juggle caregiving responsibilities and a job. I was only able to do so because I was paid during the times I used FMLA. My income was needed to help pay for gas and medicine and supplies for my mom. Ultimately, she did not have to depend on the State to help with nursing home costs because I could continue to support her with my own earnings. Please do the right thing especially for hourly wage employees so they can maintain their families during periods of FMLA.

Patricia Plakson, Talbot County

I don't think a serious family crisis should result in job loss or job insecurity for anyone. Support for workers means a healthier workforce.

Victoria Bolton, Frederick County

I support paid family and medical leave because there are times in our lives when family health needs occur, and a family member will need support. About ten years ago my mother was living alone in the condo she had shared with my father. When he passed away she was able to stay in her home because she had great neighbors to check in on her and my brother and I would each visit her on the weekends or after work. She lived within the city limits of Frederick and was able to use their Transit-Plus Bus Service for seniors and persons with disabilities. A bus would pick her up at her home and take her to doctors' appointments for a low bus fare. She was able to live there on her own independently for five years. As she aged into her upper 80's we started to see signs of cognitive challenges and she was falling more often. One fall fractured her pelvic bone and she needed full time care at home after that. My brother and I took turns staying with her while we were trying to find affordable part time home care during the weekdays. Once we found the daytime care we both continued taking turns on the weeknights and on the weekends. I worked in Bethesda and lived in Germantown. My brother worked and lived an hour away from Frederick. We both had families with children who were in college but a few years earlier they would have been in high school and needing a parent's help at this time in their life as much as a younger child would. Full time at home care was more than my mother's fixed income could afford so this was how we could manage the time and cost. I was lucky enough to have sick leave that I could use for the work days I needed to be with my mom until we could find daytime help. I know not everyone has an employer who offers that much sick leave that could be used for another family member. My employer also has a sick leave pool that employees can donate and receive sick leave hours when necessary. Fortunately, I did not need to utilize that benefit. I was fortunate that we could find a solution

for the full-time care in my mom's home that was somewhat affordable and manageable for a time. I know there are families that don't have the funds and support to manage full time care for a family member even for a short time. We were able to manage this way for several months while we could look for an affordable senior assisted living place that she would be safely cared for, where she would feel at home and she could bring her cat. Finding the right place while giving her full-time care took some time. The stress of doing all of this was dreadful and at times wore me down. I cannot imagine how someone would be able to manage a similar scenario with the fear of losing their income during that time or possibly losing their job. My story is just one of the many stories people have or will have in their lifetime. These stories include family members from the smallest premature infant trying to survive to the oldest family members trying to live their senior lives as safely and as comfortably as possible. Sometimes a family needs support. Thank you for taking the time to listen and the time to care.
Roxanne Moore, Montgomery County

When my father was terminally ill for five months, my mother, three sisters and I cared for him at home. It brought him peace to be cared for by those who loved him most and we would have had it no other way. Though it did put financial stress on us to take unpaid time off from work, we knew we were fortunate because we could all share in my father's care. Many families do not have that option. We need families to have paid leave when they need to care for loved ones during times of severe illness. In addition, as a retired social worker who specialized in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health, I know that families who are welcoming a new child into their family need paid leave. Infants and adopted children need a consistent, stable environment in the crucial first months of life or of settling into a new home. When parents have to worry about fulfilling family and work obligations, it compromises that stability.
Kate Sanner, Carroll County

I support paid family and medical leave because no one should have to choose between caring for a loved one and making a living that supports their family. No one should have to go back to work before they are fully recovered from an illness for fear of losing their job and their health insurance. A medical crisis or a new child in the family should not send workers back to square one. The unemployment caused by not insuring one's job is bad for individuals, families, businesses and the economy overall.
Annie O'Connell DeMeo, Montgomery County

I support paid family and medical leave because families are the foundation of our society. We need to support and enable families to care for each other. Families shouldn't have to sacrifice financially to provide care for each other. On a very personal level, I want to have children, but saving a sufficient safety net for maternity leave (3-4 months of salary) is a barrier to starting a family. It would be a game-changer if some or all of that leave was covered by my employer.
Ellen Line, Baltimore City

I support paid family and medical leave for the sake of those who are ill or need to be away from their jobs, for the caregivers who may need to provide care to family members. It is the

civilized thing to do, it is economically just for all involved. Children need their parents, family for extended periods when crises occur.

Mary Graham, Frederick County

Too many families have to leave their jobs to care for children or adult relatives putting their financial future in jeopardy.

Nancy Kusmaul, Howard County

Families are struggling to make ends meet, and desperately need this support.

Patricia Denne, Harford County

People need to make decisions based on health, not whether or not they will get paid. Let's join all other advanced countries in providing paid family leave.

Carol Rice, Baltimore City

Illness, dying, death, tragedy, accidents happen to everyone. It requires days if not weeks at times to deal with these. Monetary demands continue. In most cases of employment, the money stops. How are people to live!? You can change the economic picture.

Rev. Julia Hart, Talbot County

Crises happen in all families, but for those with means and the support of extended family they are generally weathered. For our fellow Marylanders whose income places them barely one step away from disaster or whose family support is not as strong, the ability to take time away from their jobs for catastrophic personal or family illness or the birth of a child can be catastrophic. It's time, Maryland. Let's knit up this critical hole in our safety net.

Gail Martin, Baltimore County

Paid family leave is necessary.

Ruth Cromwell, Baltimore County

It's the right thing to do for families.

Jocelyn Malone, Baltimore County

Marylanders deserve medical and caregiving leave. It would reduce financial and job insecurity in a time of stress and would allow workers to balance job and family responsibilities. In addition it would be a huge benefit to businesses by improving worker productivity and employee retention because employees would not have to choose between keeping their jobs and being able to take care of themselves or loved ones. And ultimately, it is a reasonable and humane expectation for a happy, healthy populace.

Sandra Graziano, Howard County

Everyone should be able to have time off to care for families. It should not be a choice to keep a job and a loved one in need. I was lucky to have an understanding boss when my mother was taken ill and was never questioned when I needed to take off to care for her.

Barbara Weiner, Montgomery County

Paid family leave is essential for the well-being of women, children, and families.

Katherine White, Montgomery County

I have been a care provider for family members & I know how much stress is involved when you're trying to figure out care, money, and work.

Betsy Schindler, Baltimore City

It's essential to keep many workers from falling into poverty.

William Samuel, Montgomery County

It's the right thing to do.

Barbara Jo Wuest, Baltimore City

Too many families do not have adequate leave to care for sick family members and support themselves. As a society we must put families and caring for our children and elderly first.

Mark Beggs, Baltimore County

When I got my cancer diagnosis at age 32, my first thought was 'I don't have enough sick leave for treatment. I'm going to lose my job and then I will lose my healthcare coverage.' I returned to work only 6 weeks after two 17 cm tumors were removed from my abdomen. I weighed less than 100 lbs and nearly fainted in my office the first day back. I didn't return to work because I was ready or healthy - I did it because I did not have access to enough paid medical leave and I needed to pay my rent. We need paid family and medical leave for our families, for our children, and our loved ones.

Jenny Egan, Baltimore City

The pandemic has shown how important it is to allow sick people to stay home and to take care of their sick family members. It's good for the economy and our society.

Heidi Rhodes, Montgomery County

No one should need to choose between taking care of themselves or a loved one and paying their bills. Healthy communities need to support the ability of the people who live in them to be healthy.

Anna Levy, Montgomery County

I am a clinical social worker specialized in treating perinatal mental health disorders which are the most common complication of pregnancy and postpartum. Financial stressors and caregiving stressors are risk factors for perinatal mental health. This is an especially vulnerable time for families and it's essential to give our parents and infants the time and financial support to get off to a good start. People need time to heal, time to bond with their child and time to establish new routines before returning to the workplace.

Andrea Agalloco, Montgomery County

Paid family and medical leave would be a smart investment in the physical and mental health and well-being of Marylanders. The benefits are clear: improved maternal and mental health, economic security, healthy development for newborn and adopted children, reduced stress, and increased productivity. It's also the right thing to do, especially as families continue to struggle with the financial pressures of the pandemic.

Carl Graziano, Howard County

Alzheimer's is a devastating disease that eventually kills. I know this first hand because I lost my mother to Alzheimer's disease. Alzheimer's affects entire families, not just those with the disease. And care is expensive! Families may cut back on food, transportation, and medical care to pay for it, or borrow money, or use retirement savings. Paying for these costs is often made even more difficult by the employment consequences for caregivers. 1 in 6 Alzheimer's caregivers had to give up their jobs either to become a caregiver, or because their caregiving duties became too burdensome. These caregivers need paid family leave. No Marylander should have to choose between the job they need, and the family they love.

John Bowers, Montgomery County

People need to be able to care for their own family after having a baby or having sick people in their family.

Molly Hauck, Montgomery County

We need paid family and medical leave to provide financial protection when caring for a loved one or oneself.

Leiora Kortvely, Baltimore City

Every single Maryland family needs paid family medical leave for an equitable, just society and to bring us into the first world with other first world countries.

Donna Martin, Baltimore County