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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 496

Labor and Employment - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program - Establishment

TO: Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and members of the Economic Matters Committee

FROM: Sarah Hiller

My name is Sarah Hiller and I am a resident of District 40. I am writing in strong support of HB 496. In order to be meaningful and effective, paid family and medical leave must be a minimum of 12 weeks, include job protection, be equally paid for by employers and employees, and be gender inclusive while covering a broad definition of family members. No one should be forced to choose between their financial stability and caring for their family or their own health. Without access to paid family and medical leave, Maryland workers are being oppressed at the exact moment they are most in need.

While studying abroad in Stockholm, Sweden during college, I had a conversation with a professor that showed me how large an influence family policy can have on individuals. He grew up in Sweden, but had done all of his higher education in the United States, where he met his wife. The two decided to move to Sweden in order to start a family because the country offers both paid parental leave and government-funded child care services. After telling me this, the professor looked at me and said, without a hint of sarcasm, "I don't know how people have children in the U.S." Obviously he knew that people do so, but he was baffled by our fundamental lack of family-friendly policies that can make parenting, and all caregiving, so difficult.

This conversation ultimately inspired me to write my senior politics thesis on parental leave and early childcare policies in the U.S. and their impact on gender inequality in the workplace. While workers of all genders need the time to care that is covered in this legislation, women still overwhelmingly bear the brunt of caregiving responsibilities in our society. Low wage workers, who are disproportionately women and disproportionately Black and Latino, are the hardest hit by the lack of PFML, as they are the least likely to have any employer-provided paid time off and may be living paycheck to paycheck. Providing paid leave to all workers, regardless of gender, will bring us closer to gender equity by allowing everyone time to care. Unfortunately, my thesis

which argues this is a bit longer than any testimony you would want to read - but if you are interested in hearing more I'd be happy to send it to you.

A commitment to "family values" rings hollow without adequate support for working parents or others who find themselves with caregiving responsibilities. This is an issue that impacts every single Marylander during their working years. Passing Paid Family and Medical Leave will allow Maryland to join the small but growing list of states that are moving closer to our stated values, help people balance work and family responsibilities, and build a safety net so people do not face a loss in income when a new child or medical issues bring new costs and caregiving demands into their lives. **I respectfully urge you to report favorably on HB 496.**