

February 15, 2022  
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**TESTIMONY ON HB 496 - FAVORABLE**  
**Labor and Employment- Family and Medical Leave Insurance**  
**Program-Establishment.**

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

**FROM:** Roni Silverstein

My name is Roni Silverstein. I am a resident of District 14. I am submitting this testimony in support of **HB 496**, Labor and Employment- Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program-Establishment.

I have been a citizen of Montgomery County for almost 50 years. I am a retired Montgomery County Principal. My schools were Fallsmead Elementary and Clopper Mill Elementary. I was a teacher for twenty-five years in Rockville, Wheaton, and Silver Spring. I am also a long-time member of the Tikvat Israel Congregation in Rockville. My faith and my career have had a profound impact on my views about equity and the disparities that exist and their impact on children and adults in our community. I believe it is our moral obligation to care for our fellow citizens. My own life experiences and those I have cared for through my work have led me to implore you to pass the Time to Care Act of 2022 to establish paid family and medical leave.

My faith believes in **Refuah** - the healing of mind and body, as well as **Kavod** - the fair treatment of workers. As a leader, I have had many experiences where I had to ensure that my teachers and staff were able to heal or help family members who were ill. I have also had my own illnesses which took me away from work and my teachers and I had babies of our own which we needed to care for. Never did I have to worry that I would lose my job or not be paid. This has been a huge privilege afforded me by working for Montgomery County Public Schools, but sadly, I have personally witnessed the heartbreaking results of many of my community members who were not so lucky.

Many families cannot afford to stay home from work to care for a sick loved one. Many children came to school ill and spent hours in our health rooms until their parents could pick them up. The past two years are a glaring example of the huge disparities that access to wealth and access to paid family leave create. Those who had family leave could stay home when they or their children were sick, however far too many Montgomery County citizens lost their jobs or just didn't get paid while they were home recovering from COVID, causing heartache and

homelessness. From the employer's point of view, employees cannot do their job if they are worried about their health or those of their loved ones.

One, of many, examples comes to mind when I think of these disparities. Not long ago, one of the kindergarten students in my school was run over by a van. He had catastrophic injuries. He spent many weeks in the Children's Hospital. His parents did not have leave to care for him and had to make the heartbreaking decision to care for him and lose their only income. Our school did everything we could to help with food, equipment, special pajamas, and funds to get them through the crisis, but sadly it wasn't enough. Why should parents need to worry about putting a roof over their head and food on their table while they are desperately hoping their little boy will survive? Lack of economic support, such as paid family and medical leave, makes it difficult for families to absorb the financial shock of a serious family or medical need. This is especially true for families of color who disproportionately lack access to needed paid leave. We cannot sit by one more year while many more families live this kind of nightmare.

Passing this legislation will make a real life difference to so many families in our county. It has been hugely successful in other states and will begin to eliminate some of the job insecurities and race-based discrimination in employment that harm and prevent the advancement of our neighbors each day. For all these reasons and far too many others to enumerate, **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB 496.**