

TESTIMONY IN **SUPPORT OF HB0496**
Labor & Employment - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program

TO: Hon. Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, & members of the Economic Matters Committee
FROM: Natalie Spicyn MD, MHS, FAAP

As a primary care physician and a new mother, I am writing to urge you to make 2022 the year that Maryland finally passes legislation enabling the creation of a Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program; by year 3 of this ongoing pandemic, we have the wisdom and the will to know that **the time has come for Maryland to pass Paid Family & Medical Leave.**

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I have taken care of countless families making impossible decisions between caring for a loved one recovering from or disabled by sequelae of COVID-19, or continuing to work to pay rent and put food on the table. I have seen parents with no options fear bringing COVID home from their frontline jobs to their immunocompromised children. Now, I see workers without adequate paid sick time returning to work prematurely, when their recovery is not yet complete, or even not having paid time off for yet another COVID-related quarantine.

Even outside of pandemic times, we need paid family & medical leave, as a moral imperative and a structural solution in our ongoing efforts to decrease health disparities. People of color are disproportionately likely to be in lower paid positions without paid leave, which results in loss of income for those who have the least resources to take unpaid leave, reinforcing the vicious cycle of poverty and its attendant detrimental health concerns.

Further, lack of paid leave impacts young families in a myriad of ways; paid leave improves rates of breastfeeding (which improves the health of both baby and mom), improves rates of on-time infant immunization (as seen in the state of California which implemented statewide leave in 2004), and even shows impact on decreasing rates of child abuse (with decreased “shaken baby syndrome again seen in California after implementation of a state-level paid family leave plan.)

I work at a community health center where, like the majority of American workers, I am not offered a paid family & medical leave plan. Instead, as I prepared for a hoped-for pregnancy, I was able to elect to purchase my own short-term disability policy to utilize after delivery. It so happened that I was pregnant with my son immediately after one of our medical assistants, a woman of color (which I am not), came back to work a mere 2 weeks after giving birth - the totality of her vacation and sick time. Workers should not need to independently elect to carry disability policies for the normal life experience of recovering from childbirth.

The imperative is clear for this long-overdue legislation. I respectfully submit this testimony requesting a **favorable report on HB 0496**, an urgently important bill for Marylanders.