

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

This testimony is being submitted by Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) in Maryland. I am a resident of District 46. **I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 275 (Time to Care Act of 2022).**

The Time to Care Act establishes a Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) program so employees could take up to 12 weeks of paid leave from work to care for the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child, care for themselves or family members with serious health or medical conditions, or address needs resulting from a military family member's deployment. The program must be funded equally by employees and employers with a 0.75% mandatory contribution each pay period, split evenly between the two (0.375% each) with employees having the right to opt-in/opt-out of the program.

I was immensely grateful, as a new parent (back in 2009), to have several weeks of paid leave while I stayed home with our first child. I was teaching in Baltimore City Schools (a very intense job). This time allowed me to heal from giving birth, and it allowed my son and me to bond. I had time to nurse him. This time together also helped me identify, as time went on, that he had special needs. Early identification is crucial – to support kids during their periods of most rapid development – and a parent who is PRESENT with a child is best positioned to recognize these needs.

At some point, nearly all of us will need a paid family Leave policy to care for new babies, aging parents, loved ones with health needs or disabilities, or for ourselves. Yet many Marylanders can't take time to care for their family members because they lack paid family leave. In fact, only 23% of civilian workers have access to paid family leave according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Unpaid leave forces too many Americans—especially those whose needs are the greatest—to choose between income and family when illness strikes, when new babies arrive, or when the needs of a family member with a disability intensify. Nearly 25% of women, for example, take ten or fewer days of parental leave, potentially putting themselves and their children at risk physically and emotionally.

Government-guaranteed paid family leave is not a unique or exceptional policy. According to the UCLA World Policy Analysis Centre, countries all over the world provide some forms of maternity or family medical leave, including Canada, the Russia, United Kingdom, and Iran. Providing leave at the state-level family medical leave isn't even new with California, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia having declared paid leave plans a right for some or all private workers.

Legislation establishing a Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program would make paid leave available to Maryland workers for up to 12 weeks following the birth or adoption of a child, and when needed to provide care for a family member or oneself. The leave would be funded through an insurance pool, into which workers and their employers contribute. This is an exceedingly popular program with 88% of Maryland residents across political affiliation supporting paid family and medical leave according to a poll done by Time to Care Maryland.

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging you to vote in support of Senate Bill 275 (Time to Care Act of 2022).

Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,
Liz Simon-Higgs
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Showing Up for Racial Justice