

Date of Hearing: 3/7/2023

Amy Ruddle
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TESTIMONY ON HB988 - POSITION: FAVORABLE
Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program - Modifications

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

FROM: Amy Ruddle

My name is Amy Ruddle and I am a resident of District 20. I am submitting this testimony in favor of HB988, Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Modifications, and urge you to resist any weakening amendments. I am a small business owner, attend Temple Emanuel synagogue, and am a volunteer and advocate with NAMI Montgomery County. A major reason I am submitting testimony on this bill is that if it were to pass, it would change my life and the lives of many, for the positive.

As someone with chronic illnesses, I have struggled to find a work-life balance that allows me to have a career and take care of myself. In 2015, I found myself with a salaried job and succeeding in that work -- until my conditions started flaring up. I begged my employer to be allowed to do a weekly check-in with my doctor so that they could determine a course of treatment. I was told I could go to the doctor on my lunch break, but that if I wanted to see the doctor at any other time, I would have to use a full sick day and take the day off. Because of this policy, I exhausted my annual sick leave in 2 months.

My doctors counseled me that I needed intensive treatment to manage my conditions, and that the best chance at recovery was a month-long hospitalization. My employer was not understanding and told me if I needed hospitalization that not only would I not be paid for that time away, but I would not be guaranteed a job at the firm when I returned. I and my doctors appealed to the HR team, but there were no accommodations made. I needed to support myself, so I kept working against my doctors' advisement. In early 2016 my body collapsed under the demands, and I quit my job entirely out of fear of my condition worsening. If this bill were in effect, I would have been able to take the leave I needed to take to get myself healthy; furthermore, I would have recovered faster and been able to get back to work sooner. Instead of taking a month of paid leave as recommended by my doctors, I instead had to spend two years trying to undo the damage caused by me continuing to work.

My story is not unique, and in fact, is one of so many examples of Marylanders who work hard for our communities yet are not able to have paid leave to take care of their health or care for

their families. FAMI programs allow individuals the paid time they need to improve their health and then return to the workforce as productive employees. Access to comprehensive behavioral health treatment improves the public health and safety of all Marylanders. Perhaps most importantly, these programs do more than help individuals: they help our society. When Marylanders can take time to care for serious illness, our entire state benefits through increased survivorship and decreases in overall health care expenditures. It is for this reason that **I respectfully urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB988 and resist any weakening amendments.**