



Maryland National Organization for Women

PO Box 7716 Silver Spring MD, 20907

BILL NO: House Bill 988

TITLE: FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE INSURANCE PROGRAM - MODIFICATIONS

COMMITTEE: Economic Matters

HEARING DATE: March 7, 2023

POSITION: **FAVORABLE**

Maryland National Organization for Women strongly supports HB 988, which modifies the Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program by specifying various aspects of programmatic implementation, administration, and the cost-sharing split. HB 988 sets the contribution rate for the program with a cost-sharing split of 50% employees, 50% employers. This is fundamentally important, as it keeps the program affordable and equitable for both employers and employees in Maryland. A 50/50 cost-sharing split is in line with most other states - including our neighboring state of Delaware - that have recently passed FMLI programs. Maryland passed one of the strongest and most comprehensive FMLI programs in the country, and establishing a 50/50 cost-sharing split is of the utmost importance to ensure our program centers the needs of both employees and employers, continuing to set the bar as a national model.

Maryland National Organization for Women's (NOW) purpose is to take action through intersectional grassroots activism to promote feminist ideals, lead societal change, eliminate discrimination, and achieve and protect the equal rights of all women and girls in all aspects of social, political, and economic life. We enthusiastically supported the Time to Care act of 2022 last session and view House Bill 988 as the next logical step in creating a truly accessible, equitable, and robust FMLI program. Paid leave is essential for healthy moms and babies. Our maternity care system often fails to provide equitable, respectful, culturally centered, safe, effective, and affordable care. It spectacularly fails communities struggling with the burden of structural racism and other forms of inequity, including: Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, rural communities; and people with low incomes. The multiple crises of the COVID pandemic, economic downturn, and national reckoning on racism have underscored the need to address the social influencers of health.

Systemic reviews conclude that Paid Family and Medical Leave improves maternal and infant health, including physical health and well-being. Women who receive paid leave have a lower chance of reporting intimate partner violence, decreased rates of infant mortality, and even increases in the function of the digestive and immune system of the child, a reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancer, diabetes, and obesity for the mother due to a well established breastfeeding relationship. Paid Family leave is not an all encompassing solution for advancing gender equity but it is immeasurably beneficial for family health and well-being outcomes, particularly infant and maternal health and overall financial stability. For those reasons, Maryland National Organization for Women respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 988.