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

TO: Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Natalie Spicyn, on behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ)

My name is Natalie Spicyn and I am a resident of District 40, in Baltimore City. On behalf of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ), I am submitting this testimony in support of HB988, Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program - Modifications. JUFJ organizes 6,000 Jewish Marylanders and allies from across the state in support of social, racial, and economic justice campaigns.

Last year, as a primary care physician, a new mother, and a Jew, I celebrated alongside other advocates when our General Assembly passed the historic Time to Care Act, advancing economic, racial, and health justice for all Marylanders, ranging from my most vulnerable patients at the community health center, to my colleagues employed in the healthcare field. Nearly everyone needs time away from work at some point to welcome a baby, care for a relative, or deal with a serious personal illness; Jewish sacred texts recognize this reality and implore employers to do right by their employees. The Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) Program will allow 2.5 million Marylanders to take time off to care for themselves and a loved one. But in order for the program to realize its full potential and promise, clarifying legislation is needed to ensure that its implementation is just and inclusive.

The 50/50 cost-sharing split is fundamental to fair and equitable coverage, especially for lower-income Marylanders. Several other provisions included within HB988 — among them clarifying language related to private plan standards, exhaustion of employer-provided leave, and state coverage of employee contribution for those making less than \$15/hour — serve to bring implementation of Maryland's FAMLI Program in line with the values of the Program and the State.

Paid leave will help my patients in numerous ways. We have ample data that paid leave improves breastfeeding rates, with health benefits accruing to both parent and baby. In California,

implementation of a state-level paid family leave plan fueled rates of on-time infant immunization, which is increasingly important given the tripledemic of this past winter, and reduced rates of shaken baby syndrome and other forms of child abuse. Black and Latine communities are disproportionately unable to take time off to care for themselves or family members, and strong and equitable paid and family medical leave is both a moral imperative and an opportunity to enact structural solutions in the fight to decrease health disparities.

We will never finish this work; it's continuous and ongoing, and reflects the quote from *Pirkei Avot* that is on our JUFJ shirts: It's not on you to finish the work, but you can't quit either. We have started the work of ensuring the health and well-being of all Marylanders by passing the initial legislation last session; now, let us not desist from implementing a program that will have that intended impact.

On behalf of Jews United for Justice, **I respectfully urge this committee to return a favorable report on HB988 to ensure strong and equitable Paid Family & Medical Leave implementation in our state.**