
BILL NO: House Bill 988
TITLE: Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Modifications
COMMITTEE: Economic Matters
HEARING DATE: March 7, 2023
POSITION: **SUPPORT**

The Women's Law Center of Maryland (WLC) is dedicated to ensuring the physical safety, *the economic security*, and the autonomy of women throughout the State. One way we work towards this goal is by supporting systemic changes to our current economic policies and practices that disproportionately affect women. House Bill 988 builds on the historic legislation from 2022 establishing the Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) Program. HB 988 modifies the FAMLI Program by specifying various aspects of programmatic implementation, administration, and the cost-sharing split.

The Time to Care Act was just the first step in realizing paid Family and Medical Leave in Maryland. The critical work to create and implement an accessible, equitable, and robust FAMLI program is the next major step in fulfilling its promise, and the General Assembly still has a key role to play in this collective effort. Passing HB 988 will set important parameters for the FAMLI program, putting the program firmly on the path toward successful implementation. **In particular, 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 FAMLI programs. Maryland passed one of the strongest and most comprehensive FAMLI programs in the country, and establishing a 50/50 cost-sharing split will ensure our program centers the needs of both employees and employers, continuing to set the bar as a national model.

Women continue to be the primary caregivers for children and family members, even more so since the start of the pandemic. Unfortunately, while women now make up nearly half the workforce, and two-thirds of Maryland families have women as the sole, primary, or co-breadwinner, women are disproportionately represented in low-wage jobs without access to paid family leave. Indeed, while only 18% of workers in general are covered by paid leave, that number is reduced to 6% for low wage workers – the workers who can least afford to go without a paycheck. As such, it should not be surprising that 15% of working women who have a child without paid leave end up on public assistance. But FAMLI will benefit the workforce as a whole, as women with paid leave are 70% more likely to return to work, thus saving employers time and money that would otherwise need to be spent on recruiting, hiring, and training new staff.

It is critical to establish the proper mechanisms now so that FAMLI can be successful for the future of our workforce. For all those reasons, the WLC urges a favorable report on HB 988.

The Women's Law Center of Maryland is a private, non-profit legal services organization that serves as a leading voice for justice and fairness for women. It advocates for the rights of women through legal representation for individuals and statewide advocacy to achieve systemic change.