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## THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

### **Testimony in Support of HB 824 Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program - Covered Individuals - Alternatively Qualified Individuals**

Testimony by Delegate Vaughn Stewart  
February 13, 2025 | Economic Matters Committee

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#### **What the Bill Does:**

This bill would expand the scope of the Maryland FMLI (Family And Medical Leave Insurance) Program to provide a \$2000 lump sum for Maryland-based workers that have just had a child but who don't meet the law's existing eligibility requirements. This would provide a 'leave-like' benefit for new parents who did not quite work enough hours during the year before or at the time their child is born. The requirement for this lump sum would be \$7200 of lifetime earnings in Maryland.

The FMLI Program acts as an insurance program, and as such, people are expected to pay in before extracting their benefits. But, unlike many programs that people need after they've already paid into them (like social security or end of life care, for example), this is a benefit that people typically need early in their lives and working careers, often before they've had a chance to pay in through earnings. This bill creates a modest benefit for individuals who have not yet paid their way into this program but still need assistance with the expectation that they will pay into the program through their participation in the workforce in the future.

#### **Why the Bill is Important:**

Parents should be able to stay home with their children when they are born. Rather than rushing back to work after a dizzying first week as parents, they should be able to spend time bonding with their child. All Marylanders deserve this dignity. HB 824 provides a small bit of wiggle room for parents who might otherwise not have any choice.

When people inevitably have children in early years of adulthood, they often do not have stable employment. The current FMLI Program requires individuals to have worked 680 hours in the past 12 calendar months to qualify for the program. While this is not an unreasonable standard, not all new parents meet this, even if they are contributing members of the workforce. Perhaps they have been in between jobs, are still dependent on their parents, or have been in

school.

The 22 year old who is looking for work after college in our tough job market should be given the chance to bond with their new child and let go of the stress of the job search for a few weeks. The recent high school grad who is enrolling in trade school should get that precious time as well. The single mom who is working as much as she can with her two little boys should have the support to take a breath as she welcomes her new daughter. These Marylanders may not be currently contributing to this program, but I believe they will in the future. Not only will they contribute to this program but they will go on to run our electricity, engineer our bridges, and work in our libraries.

By investing in our parents we are investing in the next generation of Marylanders.

### **Why the Committee Should Vote Favorably:**

It was not so long ago that our legislature originally adopted the FAMLI Program. Our legislature recognized the need for comprehensive support of new parents and caregivers. I myself voted to enact this landmark legislation. This bill represents a small step forward for that program, which is soon to be launched.

HB 824 is a common sense piece of legislation that provides for Marylanders when they are most in need so that they can contribute to our state for years to come. **I urge a favorable report.**