Testimony - SB 355, Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program -
Delay of Implementation
Unfavorable
Senate Finance Committee
February 5, 2025
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Honorable Chairwoman Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

SEIU Local 500, as one of Maryland's largest public sector unions representing over 23,000 workers, and a member of the Time to Care Act Coalition strongly **oppose SB 355**. Leaving Marylanders without paid medical and family leave benefits for an additional two years would not only hurt families in these uncertain times, it sends a clear signal to your constituents that Maryland families are a secondary consideration to the work being done in this building.

The Time to Care Act was a victory for the millions of Marylanders who have fought for access to paid leave and are eager to realize the full implementation of the FAMLI program. And, while a historic victory for all Marylanders, it was just the first step. Now we see this bill seeking to delay implementation sending a clear signal that the political will is lacking, that taking the first step on behalf of working people is apparently too much.

Delaying implementation of the FAMLI program will harm hundreds of thousands of families, caretakers, service members, and Marylanders going through a medical crisis. According to the latest actuarial study commissioned by the DOL, it's anticipated that the FAMLI program will receive over 165,000 claims in its first year, just shy of 14,000 claims a month. Consequently, a two-year delay in implementation means that over 324,000 Marylanders, who would have had access to paid leave if the program was implemented on time, will instead have to make impossible choices between caring for themselves and their loved ones or maintaining their income and paying their bills. This is the very reason Maryland lawmakers enacted the FAMLI program.

Furthermore, delaying the implementation of the FAMLI program will put Maryland behind other states. As it stands, three states that passed paid leave legislation after Maryland – Delaware, Minnesota, and Maine – will fully implement their programs before Maryland does, leaving our residents waiting. While Maryland was lauded as a national leader in paid leave policy when we passed the Time to Care Act in 2022, each year the programmatic implementation gets further delayed other states take up the mantle and lead ahead of us, leaving Marylanders behind.

SEIU Local 500's members stand with our allies in the Time to Care Coalition to strongly oppose prolonging the implementation of the FAMLI program beyond its current timeline. Since Time to Care was passed in 2022, the implementation timeline has already been delayed twice through legislation in the 2023 and 2024 legislative sessions. Our coalition supported those delays, as they were necessary to ensure DOL had adequate time to build the systems and teams needed to accept contributions and pay out benefits. We will not, we cannot support further delays and neither should anyone here. Marylanders are waiting to access paid family leave, not waiting for politicians to have the will to do what is right.

We ask for you to oppose passage of SB 355 and ask for an unfavorable report from this committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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