



SB0539 - Labor and Employment- Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program- Establishment

Presented to the Honorable Dolores Kelley and Members of the Senate Finance Committee

February 27, 2020 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges the Senate Finance Committee **a favorable report on SB0539 - Labor and Employment- Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program Establishment**, sponsored by Senators Antonio Hayes and Sarah Elfreth. Marylanders should be able to parent with dignity and not be penalized at work for being caregivers.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. As part of our efforts to protect the reproductive freedom of all Marylanders, we believe that employees should have access to paid family and medical leave to be able to care for their reproductive lives, as well as care for any children that have in a parenting role. The inability to access paid family and medical leave has a particular impact on women, who often take on the majority of responsibility for caring for children, disabled relatives, and ailing older family members, and who make up almost two-thirds of minimum wage workers. According to the 2018 Employment Characteristic of Families by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 65.1% of mothers with children under the age 6 participate in the workforce less than mothers with children ages 6 to 17 at a rate of 76.4%.¹ In contrast, employed fathers with children under the age of 6 and fathers with children between the ages 6 and 17 work equally in the workforce. Workplace paid leave is crucial for Marylanders with children to be able to parent with dignity – to financially, emotionally, and physically support a child’s basic needs.² Nurturing children when they are born, adopted, or fostered, as well as caring for children that become ill, are essential to a holistic and comprehensive vision of reproductive health, rights, and justice.

SB0539 calls for the creation of a state-run insurance fund that would pay employees wages for up to 12 weeks to cover time off to address significant healthcare needs, among them include adding a new child to one’s family or caring for a child with a serious medical condition. Revenue for the fund would be provided via a payroll deduction required of employers to withhold from an employee’s paycheck. This bill is the culmination of many years work in identifying what it the best and most feasible model for Maryland. Providing paid family leave would help more Marylanders keep their jobs and receive the necessary income on which they rely to adequately care for their families during both planned and unplanned medical situations. The ability to remain employed while addressing significant healthcare issues reduces the risk of crisis resulting in dependence on costlier public assistance and public health programs. The bill is designed to meet the needs of those who must take short-term family and medical leave, but also be supportive to the concerns of the business community. Along with improving health outcomes for working families, access to this type of paid leave reduces poverty, prevents unemployment, reduces employee turnover, and increases employee morale.

¹ “Employment Characteristics of Families—2018.” Bureau of Labor Statistics. U.S. Department of Labor. (2019).

² Center for American Progress [“More than a Choice: A Progressive Vision for Reproductive Health and Rights,”](https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2006/09/more_than_a_choice.pdf) 2006 https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2006/09/more_than_a_choice.pdf

The Family and Medical Leave Fund will be particularly helpful to new mothers, allowing the time to recover properly and care for their newborns without worrying about affording basic needs. With some women experiencing post-partum depression after labor, paid family and medical leave will provide them with both time and continuing financial support to seek treatment. Because of workplace demands, nearly one in four new mothers return to their jobs in less than two weeks after giving birth because they cannot afford to take unpaid leave. Locating adequate childcare has proven problematic for these families as Maryland bans placing newborns under 6 weeks of age in licensed childcare facilities. It is also important to note research suggesting that paid family leave can reduce stress and depression for new mothers and contribute to meaningful bonding between parent and child, which improves children's responses to external pressures and reduces risk factors for child abuse. In fact, a new study determining whether paid family leave has any impact found a lower hospital admission rate for babies suffering from deliberately inflicted head injuries in California since passing its paid family leave law in 2004, when compared with seven states that do not have paid family leave, including Maryland.³

Access to paid family and medical leave is a privilege that shouldn't be a privilege — *it should be a right*. Paid workplace leave is crucial for all people, but especially for low-income workers and those in communities of color seeking to become parents and have healthy families—a right to which we are all entitled. Historically, though, some parenting has been privileged at the expense of others, and not everyone has been able to exercise this right. Policies at work that affect pay and leave also influence family formation and pregnancy decision-making.

Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the issue of paid family and medical leave is not only a matter of wage and reproductive justice, but also an important issue of LGBTQ rights - as workplace policies have been historically developed within the heteronormative, nuclear family framework. For example, we need to acknowledge that cisgender men have the responsibility as fathers to care for their children as do mothers of their children. When Maryland families, no matter how they are formed, are left to leave their sick babies at home so that they can make enough money to afford housing and food, they are not functioning in a positive and productive work environment.

If we want to ensure that everyone has control of when and how they become parents—and to best support parents in caring for themselves and their families—we need to ensure they have flexibility in navigating their health choices. Access to paid family and medical leave upholds reproductive justice and gender equity for these workers. It means not having to decide between addressing a significant healthcare need and keeping the job that is crucial to your family's wellbeing.

The vast majority of all people will have to care for a sick relative, a new baby, or a medical issue of their own at some point during their years of employment. We strongly support all Maryland families to have the economic stability to ensure their health and medical needs are met. Therefore, **we urge a favorable report on SB0539**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

³ Klevens J, et al. "Paid family leave's effect on hospital admissions for pediatric abusive head trauma" *Injury Prevention*. February 2016.
1323 N. Calvert Street, Suite A, Baltimore, MD 21202 443-869-2970 www.prochoicemd.org