

Testimony in Support of HB 839 “Labor and Employment - Family and Medical  
Leave Insurance Program - Establishment”

Submitted to the House Economic Matters Committee

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My name is Theresa Robertson and I live in District 13.

I am here to testify in support of HB 839, because there are families all over Maryland who are making life and death decisions every day, and too often it comes down to staying at work to provide housing and food for my family or being a caregiver. For me, being a caregiver is difficult work, but I do it because I love my husband. Before he got sick, he worked hard; now that he needs me, I don't have a choice about what to do. A bill like this can make all the difference in the world for people in the workplace.

I support this legislation, which establishes a Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI) Program, through which employees may take up to 12 weeks of paid leave from their jobs to care for new children, other family members with serious health conditions or disabilities, or themselves. That option—that CHOICE—is one all Maryland workers deserve to have.

My husband, who battled juvenile diabetes for more than 32 years, began to suffer from kidney failure in 1994. I was only 30 years old, the mother of four young children and we struggled. Everything was hard and there was so much to learn and I had so much growing to do. He received a kidney pancreas transplant, had a brain tumor removed, went blind in his right eye, deaf in his right ear, and had four strokes. In October 2018, his kidneys failed again, and he is now back on dialysis. He struggles with short-term memory issues, aphasia, and cognitive impairment. This means I have to go with him to see doctors, so that I can participate in the discussions about his care and advocate for him. In June, I made the difficult decision to not return to work, because his health was deteriorating and he had too many days where he was too weak to be left at home alone. But I had a choice.

I am a strong, capable woman. We think we may have a treatment plan, which will stabilize my husband enough to possibly get back on the transplant list. I am behind on my mortgage and I have turn off notices for BGE and the water. I recently accepted an appointment to the Maryland Commission on Caregiving, because I am passionate about helping other people who share the same caregiving struggles that I do. The Maryland Caregiving Commission is also in full support of this legislation.

This bill is essential because there is over \$334 million out there in unpaid caregivers. We need to give these caregivers the opportunity to balance their careers and caring for their loved ones, so that they do not fall into similar financial situations as me. HB 839 will give people time to care, it will give them a financial safety net, and I urge a favorable report on this legislation.