



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 539

Labor and Employment – Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program – Establishment

Senate Finance Committee

February 27, 2020

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Margo Quinlan, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
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Family League of Baltimore
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Health Care for the Homeless
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Maryland Community Action
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Maryland Family Network
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Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports SB 539, 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, family members with serious health conditions or disabilities, family members who are leaving for deployment, or for their own health conditions.

The overwhelming majority of employees in the United States cannot afford to take time away from work when their families need them most. According to a report by the Center for American Progress, low-wage families are the ones most in need of financial support when illness strikes or when a child is born—and the most likely to take on the care of a family member because they cannot afford a professional caregiver.¹ Too often, out of economic necessity, new parents are forced to go back to work within days of welcoming a new child, forgoing precious bonding and recovery time. Lack of paid leave – which is concentrated in low-wage jobs – exacerbates economic inequality.² Implementing a paid family leave program, especially with a progressive pay structure as proposed in SB 539, increases the health and financial security of Marylanders living in or near poverty.

Paid Leave is good for families, good for public health, and good for Maryland's economy. Access to paid leave improves the health and wellbeing of children, parents, and caregivers. Studies show paid leave can reduce depressive symptoms for new mothers, boost maternal and child health outcomes, and promote parent-child attachment. Additionally, paid leave allows people to recover from serious illness, and creates opportunities for caregivers to tend to their family members and help them fulfill treatment plans, which reduces complications and hospital readmissions.³ Ultimately, broadening the scope of who can access paid leave reduces the likelihood that low-income Marylanders will need to access state-funded safety-net programs, which benefits Maryland's economy.

In the richest state in the country, it is unacceptable that families can fall into debt, poverty, and homelessness due to lost income from illness, deployment, or welcoming a new child. No one should have to choose between treating a serious health problem, caring for a family member, and meeting their basic needs.

MAP appreciates your consideration, and strongly urges a favorable report on SB 539.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

¹ Center for American Progress. (2019). *Paid Family and Medical Leave Must Be Comprehensive to Help Workers and Their Children*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/07/16/472026/paid-family-medical-leave-must-comprehensive-help-workers-children/>

² CLASP. (2014). *Access to Paid Leave: An Overlooked Aspect of Economic & Social Inequity*. https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/2014-04-09-Inequities-and-Paid-Leave-Brief_FINAL.pdf

³ National Partnership for Women & Families. (2019). *The Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act*. <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/family-act-fact-sheet.pdf>