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TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB539

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

TO: Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and the members of the Finance Committee

FROM: Jo Shifrin

My name is Jo Shifrin. I live in Bethesda in District 16 and I am writing in support of SB539.

The lack of paid family and medical leave has impacted my husband and me twice in the last 20 years. In 1998, we discovered that my husband's mother, who was 86 years old, living alone, and diabetic, could not manage herself or her home without a lot of help. Shortly thereafter, she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. She was adamant about not wanting to move to an assisted living community or a nursing home. So we found a house that could be adapted for two families, and moved her and ourselves into it. Her health began to quickly decline and I realized that I couldn't continue to work full-time. My employer didn't have a paid family and medical leave policy, so I left the paid workforce and became a full time caregiver. We were very fortunate that my husband had a good job and we were able to take care of my mother-in-law and all of our bills without a huge financial burden. However, I am very aware that many are not that fortunate and have to make a decision between putting food on the table for their families and taking care of themselves or a loved one.

Fifteen years later, I was working as an independent contractor when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Although working for myself allowed me to set my own hours, I found that the treatment made me so sick that it was nearly impossible for me to work for several months. Not being able to work both reduced our income and made it nearly impossible to take care of the household chores I was used to doing. A paid family and medical leave law would have reduced a great deal of the stress associated with being sick by lessening the financial burden.

At the same time I was sick, a single mother who lived nearby was suffering with the same diagnosis as me. She continued to work through her treatment because she didn't have the support she needed to take time off from work during and after her treatment. She never had the chance to rest and recover. A few months later, as I was getting back on my feet, I learned that she had died. I recently wondered if things might have been different for her if paid family and medical leave was available to allow her to take care of herself as needed.

Nearly every one of us will face a situation where we need to take off an extended period of time from work, whether to bond with a new child, take care of a loved one whose health is in peril, or take care of ourselves when an unexpected injury or illness strikes. **Paid maternity leave is a basic right enjoyed by people in every other country except the United**

States and Papua New Guinea. Since we can not count on the federal government to pass such a law, we need to pass this law in Maryland. Please make 2020 the year in which we recognize the universal needs of Maryland workers and pass this law now.

I respectfully urge a favorable report for SB539.