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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: Anna Levy

My name is Anna Levy. I am a resident of Rockville, MD, District 16. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB539, known as the Time to Care Act.

As a working mother and as an adult daughter of an aging parent, I have experienced first-hand, the importance of having access to paid leave for the birth of a child and to care for family members. In the 1980's, I was pregnant with my second child and working full time. We were fortunate that I was working for a forward-thinking non-profit organization that carried disability insurance covering 6 weeks of maternity leave at 60% salary for all staff members. This was exceptional at that time when most workplaces, including the federal government, did not provide assurances of a position to return to, much less paid leave for the birth of a child. We were prepared for that time off at a lower salary, but not that I would need to go on bed rest for 6 weeks prior to my expected due date to prevent a premature birth. The disability insurance kicked in early, but I then needed to take additional time off without pay following our son's healthy birth. Fortunately, my position awaited me upon my return and we were able to manage without my paycheck for those additional weeks.

Later, while still employed by the same family friendly organization, one of my sons required lifesaving cardiac surgery. Medical appointments, hospitalization, and recovery required many days of leave. Again, my employer allowed me to use accumulated sick and vacation leave to care for our son. When that was exhausted, they forwarded leave to me, which I paid back over time as I returned to work and earned leave. What would we have done if I had not had even that support, the assurance of a position to return to, and some, albeit diminished, income?

Fast forward to the 2010's when my 90+ year old mother needed me to be there at medical appointments, hospitalizations, and the transition from fully independent to wheelchair bound due to debilitating arthritis. Again, I was fortunate to work, now as a federal employee, in an agency that granted the use of accrued sick leave to care for ailing family members and flexible workplace options. How could I have made the choice between being able to be present to advocate for my mother's care when she was hospitalized for 6 weeks or being at work and earning my paycheck and paying bills? How does someone make the choice of caring for their

sick child, spouse, or parent when their job is not amenable to working remotely on a laptop in a hospital room or leaving work early or coming in late? Or face the loss of a job that might come with the health insurance coverage that is critical to their loved one's care?

It is our responsibility to be sure that every member of our community has the ability to take time to take care of their own health and that of their family members. Paid family and medical leave will give families more stability, and less to worry about so that they can focus on giving new parents and infants a positive start, or on critical health needs. **No one should have to choose between putting food on the table or paying the rent and caring for themselves or a loved one.** Healthy employees that are able to care for their families make healthy and productive workplaces that contribute to healthy communities.

I respectfully urge a favorable report for this important bill, SB539, the Time to Care Act.