

PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE FOR MAINE

A statewide paid family and medical leave program (PFML) will support our working families, strengthen our economy and set us on a better path to improved health and well-being, both now and well into the future.

The need for PFML is vital.

Here in Maine, only about 35 percent of workers have access to job-protected unpaid leave, meaning they must choose between losing income and taking care of themselves or a loved one who is sick.

PFML will:

- ✓ **Support Maine businesses and our state's economy.**
 - This insurance program is an investment in our economy and our people – not a burdensome tax.
 - Studies have shown that PFML boosts worker productivity and improves employee retention.
 - PFML can also increase labor force participation, which has been declining in Maine in recent years and remains below the U.S. and New England averages.
- ✓ **Empower Maine workers.**
 - It will allow Mainers to take the time they need to heal when they're sick, to care for a loved one or to bond with their newborns.
- ✓ **Benefit our state's aging population.**
 - Maine is the oldest state in the nation, and we have many older adults suffering from chronic conditions requiring long-term care. Often, this falls to family members, many of whom cannot both work and take care of their loved one.
- ✓ **Strengthen Maine families.**
 - Allowing parents to spend time with their newborns or recently adopted children has been shown to improve maternal health, childhood outcomes and family economic security.



73% of Mainers support paid family and medical leave.



Maine's demographics and economy are unique. That's why we're committed to making a policy by Mainers, for Mainers. We're committed to crafting a program that supports both workers and businesses.

How'd we get here?

The U.S. is the only developed country in the world without a national paid family and medical leave policy, leaving it up to states to piece together solutions. In 2021, the Maine Legislature created the bipartisan Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program to determine the best way to implement an equitable and inclusive policy. For two years the commission has studied existing programs in other states, received input from Maine workers and businesses and considered different funding sources and structures.

What are we proposing?

From this work, we recommended several models for the Legislature to consider. These include programs with a benefit ranging between 12 and 16 weeks, with employees receiving somewhere between 80% to 90% of their pay while taking leave. Both employers and employees would contribute to fund the cost of the program, with a contribution rate ranging between a 25/75% and a 50/50% split between them, respectively. Businesses with less than 15 workers would be exempt from participating, although they maintain the option to enroll.

What we agree on:

1. Leave should be given to care for a new child, care for a family member with a serious health condition or attend to demands related to a family member's military deployment. Safe leave should be available to address needs arising from domestic violence, harassment or stalking.
2. The definition of family includes affinity relationships, as in those considered an equivalent of a family relationship.
3. The program should include all employees: full-time, part-time, temporary and seasonal workers, as well as those in the private and public sectors. Self-employed workers could opt-in.
4. An individual may take leave to bond with a newborn or adopted child within the first 12 months of benefits being paid out.
5. Employees eligible for benefits must have worked within the prior four quarters.
6. The funding of the program should be split between employers (with 15 or more employees) and employees.
7. The contribution to the program should apply to the entire wage base.
8. Wage replacement is recommended to be 80% or 90% of wages up to a maximum of 120% of the state average weekly wage.
9. Employees should be subject to an annual 12-week maximum limit for a particular qualifying need and a 16-week combined maximum limit.
10. There should be a seven-day waiting period for medical leave.
11. There should be no additional job protection, as current federal and state family and medical leave laws provide sufficient protections.
12. Employees receiving workers' compensation benefits or unemployment insurance should not receive benefits from the paid family and medical leave program at the same time.
13. A robust oversight entity is critical. Annual and continuous tracking and data analysis to measure experience and determine future contribution rates is important.

What's next:

The Legislature will now consider the program and debate pieces like:

- The length of benefit
- The contribution rate for employees and employers
- Public or private oversight

Legislators will keep seeking feedback though:

- Public hearings and testimony
- Town halls and listening sessions led by the bill sponsors with businesses, employees and other stakeholders