

April 29, 2024

Denise Specht
President

Monica Byron
Vice President

Rodney Rowe
Secretary-Treasurer

Carrie Lucking
Executive Director

Dear Chair Klein and members of the Senate Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee,

We are writing to express our deep concerns about proposed changes to Minnesota's Paid Family Medical Leave law. Education Minnesota would be grateful to work in partnership with bill authors and the Department of Employment and Economic Development to craft a solution to the concerns surrounding the Paid Family Medical Leave program. We are committed to helping to ensure that the program is viable and a benefit to Minnesotans long into the future.

At this time, the program is already on a better footing than laws in other states because of planning by its original authors, Representative Richardson and Senator Mann. The program will be funded ahead and will provide a partial wage replacement for new parents, individuals who are seriously ill, and individuals who are caregivers to their relatives. Whether the program requires additional resources or adjustments to the benefits it offers is a question that continues to require more transparent analysis.

We do not believe that limiting the availability of leave to certain groups of individuals was the original intent of the bill, which promised twelve weeks of paid leave to individuals with serious health conditions. The amendment in the senate appears to be an effort to impose a barrier for a benefit that bill authors agree was intended to be universally available. Perhaps more troublingly, the fact of having three weeks of banked PTO is an inadequate way to assess need. A well-paid worker who is a dedicated user of their PTO may be eligible for wage replacement benefits in their first week of a qualifying health condition. A low paid worker who has tried to save their leave for the proverbial rainy day will be, paradoxically, without an umbrella for the first week.

We are also concerned about the fact that the amendment adopted last week in the senate re-imposes limits on intermittent leave that could be difficult for individuals seeking treatment for chronic conditions like cancer. Because the substantive changes to this program will harm workers, we have questions about whether these changes are necessary. We also have concerns about the way in which these changes have been communicated with stakeholders; for example, DEED shared proposed changes with Senator Mann, but not with our labor coalition partners after assuring us that would happen after meetings.

By contrast, the business community seems satisfied by the amount of access they had to DEED staff, even while continuing to be dismayed by the existence of paid family medical leave writ large. By limiting their voluntary outreach to the business community, DEED has unwittingly insulated itself from a holistic picture of possible solutions to the problem it perceives. The result is a proposed solution that penalizes workers for conserving their sick leave and employers for providing sick leave. Thus, individuals who are paying into the program are nonetheless unable to access it in the first week.

We do not believe that the proposed changes to the PFML program are ready for prime time. We are asking to pause these changes until consultation with all stakeholders has occurred. Education Minnesota and its labor partners would like to be part of a solution and request the opportunity to work meaningfully on this with DEED, because we know that DEED shares our commitment to providing a top-quality program that serves workers at all levels. But that cannot happen unless the program provides first-week benefits to as many individuals as possible.

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*Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers,
the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.*



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Education Minnesota and its coalition partners are proud proponents of the PMFL program, and we stand ready and willing to work with DEED to make it the best it can be. The Legislature passed this law with the understanding that it would cover all twelve weeks of leave, and we are asking DEED to work with us to make that a reality.

Together,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Denise Specht". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Denise" and last name "Specht" clearly distinguishable.

Denise Specht
President, Education Minnesota

