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Montgomery County Council Bill 32-16 – Human Rights and Civil Liberties – Earned Sick and Safe Leave – Use of Earned Sick and Safe Leave – Parental Leave

September 20, 2016

SUPPORT

My name is Emily Shetty, and I am the co-chair of the Advocacy Committee of the Woman's Democratic Club of Montgomery County. I am also the very proud, and sometimes exhausted, mom to a sweet and wonderful 10 month old baby boy, Ayden, and I am a full-time working parent and active community member in Montgomery County. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the WDC Board, in support of Bill 32-16, which will expand the use of earned sick and safe leave for parental leave. As many of you know, the WDC is one of the largest and most active Democratic Club in Montgomery County with over 400 members (both women and men) – many of whom are also working parents. Thank you Councilmember Hucker, and Co-sponsors Council Vice President Berliner, and Councilmembers Katz and Navarro for your leadership on this issue.

WDC urges the passage of Council Bill 32-16. This bill further expands upon the great work of this council in its earlier passage of earned sick and safe leave, and further improves that program by allowing parents to use this accrued time for parental leave purposes. It is a common sense, small step that can help support working families throughout the county.

Too many Marylanders must make the difficult and painful choice between a desperately needed paycheck and caring for themselves or their families. I was lucky. When I had Ayden last October, my employer offered six paid weeks. And while 6 weeks is less than many of my colleagues at other firms received, and even less than families in every other developed countries receive, I still considered myself incredibly lucky. When week 7 came, I had to decide between my paycheck and job, and my child, and ultimately I had to scramble to find friends to watch Ayden before my longer-term childcare arrangements had settled. Again, I was lucky. I have an incredible network of support. However, a parent's ability to care for a newborn child without jeopardizing the family's economic security should not depend on luck. Only 13 percent of workers in the United States have access to family and medical leave through their employers. Sadly, nearly one in four new mothers return to work less than two weeks after giving birth because they lack access to earned paid leave for this purpose and cannot afford to take unpaid leave. Having just gone through this process less than one year ago, I honestly cannot imagine the physical and emotional stress of those new mothers who must leave a newborn child at home and return to work so soon.

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The United States stands alone in the developed world in not providing paid family and medical leave to its workers. California, New Jersey and Rhode Island have successfully established paid family and medical leave programs with minimal negative economic impact. It is time for Maryland and Montgomery County to join these states and provide this most basic benefit to our hard working families. Council Bill 32-16 is the first step.

We ask your support for Council Bill 32-16 and strongly encourage passage of this critical measure. Thank you.