

I am Lisa Mason, the owner of Fiddleheads Cuisine in Moretown. I love being a small business owner, helping the economy grow and being connected to the members of my community. It has been an incredibly successful and rewarding venture over the past seven years. However, being self-employed comes with its challenges.

As a self-employed entrepreneur, there is no paid time off for illness or parental leave, not to mention access to affordable health care coverage. Being eight months pregnant with my second child, with no paid maternity leave in sight once again, this challenge has never been more relevant to me personally.

It is almost on a monthly basis that I consider the idea of giving up my business to get a job somewhere with benefits, as it is truly difficult to make ends meet without them. But I love what I do. I love knowing that I'm not only contributing to the health and happiness of my community members but also to the health of the Vermont economy.

When my husband and I decided to start a family, it was a major concern that we wouldn't be able to take any paid time off. But, we ultimately knew that this was a step we wanted to take. So we did, and we continue to struggle financially as a result. At the same time as we have rising expenses due to a growing family, we have also had to drain our savings to pay for maternity leave and medical costs related to pregnancy and birth, leaving us vulnerable to any unexpected financial burdens. And we are among the lucky ones who at least have the option. Many simply cannot go without eight weeks of income, and their mental and physical health, as well as the health of their children, suffer as a result of not having the space and time to bond as a new family. While the birth of a child is a time of endless love and joy, the transition into parenthood is equally full of overwhelming challenges and immense adjustment.

A family and medical leave insurance program would be a life-changing support for the many entrepreneurs and self-employed business owners in Vermont, and ultimately help young professionals stay in our great state, and attract new families to settle here.

Family and medical leave insurance is not complicated. Other states have taken the lead and Vermont has many good models to learn from.

There's no need to prolong this hardship. The positive impacts of supporting growing families will have ripple effects throughout society. We must move forward for the sake of our workforce, families, and economy.