



MAINE PL

Project Highlight

“Everyone here cares about the mission and wants to see these benefits in the hands of the people of Maine.”

-Luke Monahan, Director

In the early 2000s, Carl Robbins was the owner and operator of a bookstore in small-town Maine. When an accident left Carl severely injured, he was forced to shutter his business, leaving him with no source of income. “I was just running this little store like so many other small business owners in Maine, and then I had to shut down my business, and my income went to nothing. I was borrowing money to get through,” Carl said. At the time, there wasn’t a program to ensure Mainers like Carl could receive paid time off to handle unexpected life events—but in 2023, this would change.

The Maine Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program was signed into law in July 2023. The state-mandated program would provide up to 12 weeks of paid time off for eligible employees and self-employed individuals when a life event prevents them from working. “If this program had existed, I could have been paying a small amount of money out of my income and, when I got injured, been able to have roughly 70% of my income as replacement for up to 12 weeks,” Carl said.

PFML would be overseen by the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) and funded through contributions from both Maine businesses and employees. However, before Mainers could benefit from the new program, MDOL would need to build a new team, develop new rules, and implement new software.



Project Dates

July 1 – December 31,
2024

Project Type

*Paid Leave
Contributions*

Agency Name

*Maine Department of
Labor (MDOL)*

Population

1.4 million

Capital

Augusta

Fun Fact

*Maine is the top US
producer of lowbush
blueberries.*



Left to right: Back Row, Tim Murphy, Katelyn Hood, Lauren McClain-Seymour, Tracy Seubert, Tammy Thompson, Carmen Wright, Hope Buzzel, Carl Robbins, Reggie Parson, Luke Monahan, Tim Applegate, Gregory Forney. Front Row: Amy Philbrick, Safiya Khalid, Lisa Montagne, Stephanie Harfoush, Shannon Fields, Emily Stetson, Judith Shaw, Trish Wiggins, Lynda Day, AJ Sevigny, Sarah Brydon.



Finding a System

Maine Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) legislation dictated two deadlines: contributions to the program had to begin in January 2025, and benefit distributions had to begin in May 2026. The legislation also allocated funding for the creation of a 5-person team, which would be responsible for the design and implementation of the program. The team's first tasks were crafting rules for the program and finding a software system that could support employer contributions to the program.

MDOL explored incorporating PFML into their existing unemployment insurance (UI) system, but ultimately decided it would be too risky. Deputy Director Reggie Parson said, "There's a lot of

differences in business processes between UI and PFML that would have required large-scale system modifications in a short period of time." Given the circumstances, the PFML team opted to seek out a new system instead.

"Maine has been waiting to have PFML for years, if not decades. People were ready for the program to be here, and they didn't want any delays."

—Luke Monahan, Director of Maine Paid Family and Medical Leave

Knowing that time was short, MDOL initiated the procurement process for a new system. As they reviewed their options, they were excited to find a system that met all their requirements—including a customer-facing portal—and had a proven history of being implemented quickly. In July 2024,

MDOL partnered with Fast Enterprises (FAST) to implement a system that would successfully begin processing contributions less than six months later.



Leveraging an Existing Foundation

By partnering with FAST, MDOL started with a strong foundation for their PFML system. FAST's commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) solution came with baseline functionality already established, allowing MDOL to focus on implementing rules and business processes rather than building a new system from scratch. "At the start of our project, there was a lot already prepared. We didn't have to figure out everything as we went," said State of Maine Project/Program Manager Jill Instasi.



Left to right: Tim Applegate, Ed Shin, Carl Robbins, Bree Hansteen

In anticipation of the project starting, FAST project staff came prepared. Director Luke Monahan said, "FAST had done an initial build of the software before the project started. We still had to make changes as we developed the rules around the legislation, but I was

very impressed with the first iteration." MDOL staff were prepared to leverage the advantages of a COTS system and the best practices already built into it. FAST Project Architect Bragdon Bester said, "The team was very open to accepting the system as it was configured. They were also open to designing their business processes based on our recommended best practices and standards." As staff from FAST and MDOL came together to form a cohesive project team, openness on both sides enabled them to build a trusting and productive relationship. "We had a really good working relationship with the MDOL staff and there was mutual trust. Having that mutual trust is the key to making a project go as smoothly as it can," said Sarah Enoch, FAST Project Manager.

As the project progressed, the COTS model supported efficient decision-making. Luke said, "FAST made it very easy: here are the choices you can make, here are the consequences, and here's our recommendation. Sometimes we said, 'No, that won't work for us, but this will,' and then we'd work out the details with the FAST team and it worked great." Having a strong foundation for the PFML system enabled MDOL to speed through the implementation process in under six months and meet the January 2025 legislative deadline for employer contributions. Deputy Director Reggie Parson said, "I was just amazed. In six months, we had a portal up and running—and it all happened while we were doing rulemaking at the same time."

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"There are a lot of people who have nothing to lean back on. You cannot predict what's going to happen in life, and this program is here to provide something so you can still pay your mortgage while you're in the hospital recovering."

—Tim Applegate, Director of Finance and Audit Division

"Maine is a state of small businesses and innovative entrepreneurs. As much as these small businesses want to be able to provide these benefits, they are struggling to do so. The PFML program provides an opportunity for these businesses to provide benefits to their employees."

—Judith Shaw, Appeals Unit Chief





Communication and Messaging

Ensuring Maine employers were informed about the new paid leave program was a priority for Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) staff. Sarah Brydon, Claims Administration Division Director, said, “There were some employers who were skeptical about how it was going to work. A big part of our team’s outreach plan was to make sure employers understood the program so that everybody felt empowered with knowledge and could move forward.” She continued, “Change management at this sort of scale is so difficult. You’re going to be most successful if you use a lot of different techniques all at the same time.” MDOL staff leveraged communication campaigns, webinars, and their team members’ existing relationships with payroll companies and other organizations to spread the word.



The rulemaking process also served to inform and involve the public. Deputy Director Reggie Parson said, “Submitting the rules for public comment kicked off a lot of engagement and feedback that ultimately led to 1,600 comments from 500 different individuals and organizations across the state.” Director Luke Monahan explained, “In routine rulemaking, you’ll have maybe 20-30 commenters. It was a lot of work, a lot of review, a lot of feedback at once, but the rulemaking process was crucial to create buy in for the program.”

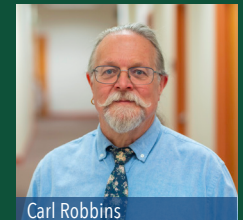


What’s Next

In January 2025, MDOL implemented their Paid Family and Medical Leave system and began accepting employer contributions through their Maine Paid Leave Contributions Portal. Through a twist of fate, Carl Robbins now proudly works as the Contributions Unit Manager for the PFML team. When asked what the future will bring for the team, Carl noted, “Since the PFML program framework is still new, it will likely see changes over the next few years. The fact that the system is so adaptable and changeable is going to be tremendous.” Agency staff are eagerly anticipating getting funds into the hands of Mainers in May 2026.

“I tell my staff, ‘You are part of something that is monumental for Maine. It’s going to directly and positively change people’s quality of life.’”
—Stephanie Harfoush, Audit and Compliance Unit Manager

Director Luke Monahan said, “That’s the piece we keep looking forward to—this is going to be transformational to people’s lives and how they approach work.”



Carl Robbins



Jill Instasi



Judith Shaw



Luke Monahan



Reggie Parson



Sarah Brydon



Stephanie Harfoush



Tim Applegate