The 128th Legislature of the State of Maine
State House
Augusta, ME

Dear Honorable Members of the 128th Legislature,

Under the authority vested in me by Article IV, Part Third, Section 2 of the Constitution of Maine, I am hereby vetoing LD 1376, “An Act To Create the Maine Family First Employer Award.”

This bill requires the State Workforce Board (SWB) to create a new award program, the “Maine Family First Employer.” Businesses would submit an application to be reviewed by the SWB or its designee. The criteria “may include” flexible work schedules, leave and vacation policies, workplace accommodations, flexible benefit packages, job-sharing, child care options and any policy that promotes the hiring or retention of working parents.

The State Workforce Board already awards the Silver Collar Award for employers who value their older workers, and it requires no statute to do so. Such award programs as proposed in this bill have no need to be enacted in statute.

While this bill mandates the award, the bill only suggests possible criteria using the term “may include.” Simply put, this statute creates the title of an award and leaves it to the SWB to actually create the substance of the award. If the SWB can pick and choose criteria for the award, why do we need a statute?

This is a feel-good bill that does nothing but create a name for the award and require that the award by this name be given annually to any employer that meets the “to be determined” criteria. There are further complications: the criteria could change over time, rendering the award meaningless, or the employer could be found in violation of the labor laws governing the criteria. Can an employer lose their “family first” designation for violating labor laws?

Supporters of the bill believe that such an award would showcase Maine employers as being good places to work and help attract workers to our state. There are already nationally recognized awards in the private sector that do that. What will attract workers to Maine over other states is a wider variety of jobs with thriving employers and more money in workers’ wallets. We can achieve both of these objectives through lower taxes and lower energy costs, priorities of my Administration, but not of the Democrats in the Legislature.

Rather than sitting around thinking of catchy names for awards, we should be focusing on legislation that will address our workforce shortage and make a real difference for the hard-working people of Maine.

For this reason I am returning LD 1378 unsigned and vetoed. I strongly urge the Legislature to sustain it.

Sincerely,

Paul R. LePage
Governor