



MAINE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

THE ROAD TO PFML: MAINE'S SIX- MONTH SPRINT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In fall 2023, Maine became the 13th state to enact a Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program, giving workers access to up to 12 weeks of paid time off for qualifying life events ranging from serious medical conditions to welcoming a new child. Just months later, in January 2024, the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) was formally tasked with implementing this landmark program with two ambitious deadlines: begin collecting employer contributions by January 1, 2025, and start paying benefits by May 1, 2026.

Despite a tight timeline, evolving regulations, and limited resources, Maine leapt into action. In a rare achievement for public sector projects, Maine met its first deadline—launching a secure, cloud-based, mobile-friendly, 24/7 self-service portal for employer contributions on January 1, 2025.

At its core, this is a story about delivering for the people of Maine. From day one, the focus remained on building a solution that works for all employers—from large corporations to small, family-owned businesses—and provides a reliable, accessible, and paperless experience.

This wasn't just a successful system launch: it was a demonstration of how agencies can execute projects on time without compromising current or future quality. This implementation was intentionally designed to scale and adapt, ensuring long-term success. With the benefit rollout on track for 2026, Maine is prepared to meet the legislative deadline of delivering benefits.



IDEA

What problem or opportunity does the project address?

The U.S. is one of the few countries in the world without a national PFML program, often putting workers in difficult positions. In the fall of 2023, Maine became the 13th state to bridge that gap by passing a PFML program, providing eligible workers with up to 12 weeks of paid time off for qualifying leave. Examples of qualifying situations include medical conditions or caring for a family member with a serious health condition, bonding with a new child, dealing with the transition of a family member's impending military deployment, or recovering from abuse or violence. Self-employed individuals and tribal residents can also opt into the program.

Qualifying Life Events Include:

Medical conditions

Caring for a family member with a serious health condition

Bonding with a new child

Dealing with the transition of a family member's impending military deployment

Recovering from abuse or violence

Why does it matter?

This project was a strategic investment in Maine's people and economy. By allowing individuals to return to their jobs once their personal or medical

needs have been met, PFML stabilizes the economy and promotes overall workforce retention. Maine is working hard to ensure that all eligible workers in the state, regardless of their employer's location, have access to PFML. Employers benefit, too. PFML helps retain experienced employees, lowering turnover and reducing the costs of hiring and training replacements. This is especially important in industries facing workforce shortages.

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Maine PFML represents a huge step toward improving how state governments engage with individuals and businesses, creating a more accessible, secure, and efficient government experience.

What makes it different?

PFML itself is a relatively new concept nationally, and Maine is among the early adopters. Implementation began while legislative rules to govern the program were still being developed and staff were still being hired—a major contrast to software implementations for established programs, which typically include experienced staff and familiar regulations. Maine had to build the PFML program from the ground up, with everyone learning the fully digital and paperless system as it evolved.

One of the most unique aspects of this story is the timeline: **The time from contract signing to the public system launch was a mere six months—** a rare feat for any software project, let alone in government.





24/7 mobile-friendly self-service portal offers simple, intuitive interfaces

What makes it universal?

As PFML programs become more common nationwide, Maine's initiative serves as a model for efficiently rolling out such programs. The project demonstrates how to balance speed with security, user accessibility, and digital-first solutions, offering a blueprint for other states looking to implement similar programs.

Maine launched a fully digital, cloud-hosted system featuring a 24/7, online self-service portal for employers and stakeholders. All interfaces were designed to be simple, intuitive, and mobile-friendly while also meeting stringent security standards and offering business intelligence for data-driven decision-making.

IMPLEMENTATION

What was the roadmap?

Maine was tasked with collecting taxes beginning January 1, 2025, and paying benefits starting May 1, 2026. The state faced an ambitious timeline to develop a system that would support the collection of employer contributions and the eventual distribution of benefits.

Maine quickly formed an expert team to oversee the rulemaking process and partnered with a vendor with a proven track record of delivering similar projects at accelerated timelines. Leaders also purposefully chose a commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) product with purpose-built functionality for managing the entire contribution process, including employer registration, payroll processor designation, and quarterly wage report filing. The software's configurable design accommodated Maine's technical and business needs, offering the flexibility to adapt to evolving rules and the scalability to support agencies of all sizes, regardless of how many employers, employees, or staff users needed access. This aligned with Maine's goal of ensuring long-term sustainability.

Who was involved?

The project involved close collaboration between:

- MDOL
- State governor's office
- State legislature
- External vendors
- Local community members and business owners

The primary software vendor, Fast Enterprises (FAST), dedicated a system architect, a front-end team, a back-end team, a compliance team, a training manager, a tech support team, an accessibility team to perform usability studies, and other critical project resources.



How did you do it?

Leaders mitigated risk by partnering with a vendor with ample experience implementing similar systems for similar government programs. This decision to implement a COTS product enabled the project to skip the laborious development phase, start with a largely predefined environment, and focus on configuring the system for Maine's specific needs. The project also leveraged the software vendor's resources and best practices from past projects to ensure success.

Given the fast-paced nature of the project and the program's complexity, adaptability was a top priority.

Rules were still being finalized during development, so the system needed to support frequent updates without disrupting progress. To manage this uncertainty, Maine embraced an iterative approach to project management and execution. Because the software vendor's team worked on site, the project team could quickly pivot as requirements evolved—ensuring continuous alignment between business rules and technical implementation.



To guarantee the system would be easy to use for all employers and comply with accessibility regulations, FAST's Usability and Accessibility Team was on site to conduct reviews and identify any potential issues. Automated testing can miss up to 60% of accessibility barriers, so the project followed a user-first method that leveraged assistive technologies, such as screen readers, to complete realistic, high-traffic user journeys. This approach provided a comprehensive snapshot of the overall accessibility that may not be possible with other testing processes.

Usability was equally critical for Maine's staff. As new staff joined—many unfamiliar with PFML processes—the intuitive, easy-to-learn system was key to getting users up to speed. This focus on user experience minimized onboarding time and supported smooth operations as the program scaled. Prior to launch, Maine hosted webinars to familiarize customers with the new system and set up a call center to assist users with questions post-launch.



The system is built using Microsoft technology and managed by the software vendor on the Amazon Web Services (AWS) cloud. This infrastructure provides the security, flexibility, and scalability necessary to handle increasing demand and maintain compliance with cybersecurity standards.

Throughout the project, communication and coordination were key. Public town halls and feedback sessions provided valuable input from businesses and community members, which helped shape the final program design. At the same time, the project maintained ongoing communication with the Governor's office and the Maine legislature, ensuring that all stakeholders were aligned and informed throughout the development process.

By combining iterative development with configurable software and a strong focus on collaboration and usability, the team delivered a future-proofed solution that would evolve with the program while staying responsive to ongoing changes in policy and practice.



IMPACT

What did the project make better?

The launch of Maine's PFML employer portal has improved the way employers and employees interact with the state's workforce support systems. Through a digital-first approach, Maine delivered a modern, streamlined, paperless solution that enhanced the overall user experience, increased access, and boosted operational efficiency across the board.



Maine successfully implemented the employer contribution portal on time and on budget, protecting state funds from delays and cost overruns. The transition away from paper-based processes eliminated printing and mailing costs, reduced manual workloads, and paved the way for future improvements in benefits systems. The portal's scalability and flexibility ensure it can grow with the program over time.

For employers and payroll administrators, the new system introduced a centralized, user-friendly platform for managing contributions to the PFML program. Designed with a wide range of users in mind, the portal makes registration and contribution management intuitive and accessible for large corporations, small family-run businesses, and everything in between. By streamlining these processes, the system has improved compliance and reduced administrative burdens.

Accessibility was a major area of focus. The platform complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), featuring responsive design for various devices, clear navigation, language toggling, full keyboard functionality, assistive device compatibility, and customizable visual settings.

The new system is user-friendly and equitable.

With 24/7 online access, the portal removes barriers for individuals who may face challenges accessing in-person services, including those in rural or underserved communities. This service availability cannot be understated, as approximately 40% of Maine's population lives in rural areas.

The broader impact on Maine's business environment is already evident. By simplifying compliance and creating a seamless experience, the system supports businesses of all sizes. Ultimately, this project has made it easy, fast, and equitable for everyone to engage with the PFML program—strengthening Maine's workforce safety net while promoting efficiency and modern technology.



How do you know?

A number of critical metrics showcase the success of the digital portal:

Early Adoption

Over 100 employers registered in the first hour after the system went live. In the first week, registrations also exceeded projections—around 8,000 employers, or 13% of the state, registered. As of this writing, employers for around 90% of the state's employees have registered.

Easy Registration

Employers registered quickly in the first week, with average registration times of 9 minutes on desktops and 5 minutes on mobile devices.

Accessible

The system is ADA and WCAG compliant, ensuring accessibility for a wide range of users.

Digital-first

The elimination of paper-based processes has improved operational efficiency, reduced mail costs, and contributed to a more sustainable approach.

Customer Satisfaction

Early feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, indicating that the system is meeting its goal of making it easy for employers to manage their PFML obligations.



90%
of employers
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5 MINUTES
time to register on
mobile device in
first week

What now?

Maine is currently focused on developing interfaces to integrate the PFML system with other state systems as they come online, including the PFML benefit distribution system, which is scheduled to go live by May 1, 2026. This ongoing development ensures that the system remains flexible and adaptable to future needs. Additionally, the planned introduction of a chatbot in June 2025 will further enhance user experience by providing real-time support.

In the long term, the PFML system's sustainability is ensured through continuous maintenance and updates to keep pace with regulatory changes and user needs. As the program scales, it will not only continue to serve Maine's workers but also provide a model for other states looking to implement similar systems. The ongoing investment in the system will ensure that it remains a vital resource for Maine's workforce for years to come—all while delivering a high ROI in terms of operational savings and enhanced constituent engagement.

This accomplishment underscores the value of a flexible, integrated solution, collaboration across all project teams, and a commitment to both technical excellence and user-centric design. Maine PFML demonstrates how a well-executed project can meet aggressive timelines, navigate changing rules, and deliver meaningful support to workers.

