

# Family Leave Benefits

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**Millions of American workers who qualify for unpaid family or medical leave simply cannot afford to take it.**

Although the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) guarantees unpaid leave for childbirth or to care for a family member, many workers can't afford to take leave. Seventy-eight percent of American workers who qualify for leave under the FMLA say they do not take it because they cannot afford to go without pay. Families suffer from the loss of income without paid family leave—increasing the strain on state unemployment insurance and state welfare system. Nearly one in ten workers who take unpaid leave are forced onto public assistance.<sup>1</sup> The right to take leave is meaningless if a worker can't afford it.

**Family and work patterns have shifted dramatically, but our nation's policies have failed to keep up.**

In most families, both parents work for pay and simultaneously care for family members. The proportion of mothers with children aged six to 17 in the workforce increased from 38 to 78 percent between 1955 and 2004. During the same period, working mothers who have children under six increased from 18 to 62 percent. Today, 60 percent of mothers with a child one year of age or younger are in the workforce.<sup>2</sup> More families will care for elderly relatives in the future. In one longitudinal study, more than a third of Americans (35 percent) reported that they had significant eldercare responsibilities; a third of that group had to reduce their work hours or take time off to provide care.<sup>3</sup> There are only two federal laws in place to help families meet the needs of both work and family members—but neither addresses the need for paid family leave. State policymakers can help Americans forced to choose between paying the bills and caring for a seriously ill relative by enacting family leave benefits.

**Family leave insurance strengthens families, businesses and the economy.**

The majority of employers—84 percent—report that granting workers leave under the FMLA resulted in benefits that outweigh its costs. Ninety percent found that productivity, profitability and growth were either positively or neutrally affected by FMLA compliance.

**States have led the way in fostering family-friendly workplaces by guaranteeing family leave benefits.**

California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island have Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) systems that provide partial wage replacement for employees who are temporarily disabled for medical reasons, including pregnancy and childbirth. Minnesota, Montana and New Mexico have laws or pilot initiatives that establish At-Home Infant Care (AHIC) programs to provide eligible low-income working parents with some wage replacement while they care for new children. At least seven states (CA, CT, HI, ME, MN, WA, WI) have laws that require private-sector employers to permit employees to use their paid sick days to care for certain sick family members.

**California enacted the first comprehensive family leave insurance statute.**

California's law allows workers to collect partial wages for up to six weeks while they take time off to care for an infant or a seriously ill family member. The law covers approximately 12 million workers and is employee-funded. Workers are eligible for benefits of up to 55 percent of their wages, ranging from \$50 to \$840 a week.

**Americans overwhelmingly support paid family leave.**

Since 1993, the FMLA has allowed more than 50 million Americans to take job-protected leave to care for themselves or loved ones. Polls show that Americans support not only the current FMLA, but an expansion of the policy that would provide paid family and medical leave. Four out of five working women surveyed said that access to paid family and medical leave is more important than increased pay,

promotions and job flexibility.<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes

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1. U.S. Department of Labor, "Balancing the Needs of Families and Employees: Family and Medical Leave Surveys," 2000.
2. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment Characteristics of Families," June 2005.
3. Families and Work Institute, "Highlights of the 2002 National Study of the Changing Workforce," September 2003.
4. Lake Snell Perry & Associates, "Ask a Working Woman Survey," conducted for the AFL-CIO, March 2002.

## Updates

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