

Paid Family and Medical Leave

Talking Points



Use these talking points to urge your policymakers to prioritize paid leave.

Note: The talking points below address paid family and medical leave which allows workers to take paid time off to care for their families or themselves. **Paid family leave** most often refers to time taken to care for a baby after birth or adoption. **Paid medical leave** refers to time taken if a worker, their child, or other family member has a serious health need.

America's future needs paid family and medical leave.

- The first three years are an essential time of development for babies and families. Because early relationships nurture early brain connections that form the foundation for all learning and relationships that follow, parents and caregivers are on the front line of preparing our future workers, innovators, and citizens.
- Most working parents do not have access to paid family and medical leave. Many parents must make the impossible choice between unhurried time to bond with and care for their babies and losing their jobs or economic security.
- The lack of a permanent national paid family and medical leave policy disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx families who overall have less access to paid leave and fewer financial resources to allow them to take leave, even when paid a percentage of their wages.
- Now is the time for policymakers to secure the best beginnings for children and the best health and future for our country by creating a permanent comprehensive paid family and medical leave program.

COVID-19 laid bare the need for paid leave.

- When COVID-19 hit, in the absence of a national paid leave policy, many families were left without means of financial support. Some had to make difficult choices for their children's care because they simply could not do without a paycheck and were unable to take the time off to meet those family needs.
- Without an established national paid leave program, in this crisis, many families had no choice but to continue to earn for their families even when they had children at home or felt ill. In Rhode Island and California, where there were paid leave programs in place prior to the pandemic, there were strong surges in paid leave claims after the pandemic began.
- While emergency paid family and medical leave was ultimately created through the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act*, it provided only a temporary solution. Despite robust (84%) support from voters, the U.S. does not have a permanent paid family and medical leave program.

Think Babies Top 5

1. Paid family and medical leave gives families paid time off to care for a new child or to care for themselves or their baby when they are facing a serious health condition – without sacrificing economic security.
2. While many workers have *unpaid* time off through the *Family and Medical Leave Act* of 1993, the vast majority of workers do not have paid family or medical leave.
3. Paid leave helps families build secure relationships with their babies that are so important to babies' long term learning and success. It also benefits babies' health, and is even a protection against infant mortality!
4. The lack of a national paid leave policy disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx families and babies.
5. 84% of voters want a national paid family and medical leave plan for all workers.

Paid leave supports babies' development.

- A baby's beginning lays the foundation for all to come. For babies, every interaction is a lesson in how the world works, how they are valued, and how people relate to one another. Caring, consistent relationships experienced by young children help establish a child's ability to learn, to form positive relationships, to exercise self-control, and to mitigate stress.
- Time to care means more secure, confident babies who are ready to learn. Security is an essential building block for social and emotional health and learning. Babies are driven by their needs. Adults learn a baby's cues through focused attention and response over time, offering a sense of security. Paid leave gives families crucial time to foster these connections.
- Having time to care for their babies helps parents catch developmental problems early. This is especially important for caregivers of infants who are considered at high risk, such as babies born preterm or at low birth weights and those who have illnesses or identified disabilities.
- Studies show a number of positive outcomes when fathers take paid family leave:
 - Fathers who take two or more weeks off after the birth of a child are more involved in that child's direct care nine months after birth than fathers who take no leave.
 - Involved fathers promote children's educational attainment and emotional stability.
 - A father's involvement in a newborn's care in the first six months can mean both mother and baby sleep better.

Paid leave supports babies' health.

- Paid leave helps parents stay up to date with preventive care. Time at home with babies gives parents the time they need to attend well-child medical visits and ensure that their children receive all necessary immunizations.
- Paid leave makes breastfeeding easier—which saves lives and money. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a baby's life, but breastfeeding can be challenging for mothers and babies. Paid family leave offers unrushed time that allows opportunity to learn and practice the skill.
 - Studies show that paid leave yields higher rates and longer periods of breastfeeding, reducing the rates of childhood infections.
 - For low-income families in New Jersey, where a statewide paid family leave program has been in effect since 2009, researchers found that new mothers who use the state paid leave program breastfeed, on average, one month longer than new mothers who do not use the program.
 - If 90% of women in the United States breastfed their babies for the first 6 months of life, it would save 900 babies and \$13 billion in healthcare expenses annually.
- Parents may also need paid medical leave when their babies have serious illnesses. For example, the rates of childhood cancer have been increasing over the past 20 years. Almost half of all pediatric cancer occurs during early childhood, with the peak incidence of invasive childhood cancer occurring during infancy.
- When babies have serious health needs, having their parents care for them can improve their recovery. Having that time can also help parents learn how to best care for their sick children.
- Time with parents can be a matter of survival. After reviewing family leave policies in 19 countries, researchers found that a 10-week extension of leave was predicted to decrease overall infant mortality by 2% and post-neonatal (28 days to 1 year) infant mortality by 6%.

Paid leave supports outcomes for the entire family.

- Moms are healthier with paid leave. Longer leave periods are associated with health benefits for new mothers, including declines in depressive symptoms, a reduction in the likelihood of severe depression, and improvement in overall health. Children's development is deeply affected by their parents' mental health and well-being.
- With paid leave, families are less stressed about their ability to provide care. Parents who use state paid leave programs report better health, lower stress, and a higher satisfaction with their ability to care for their new children compared to parents who do not use the program.

- Promising data suggests babies are safer with paid leave. Research in California suggests that paid leave may also help prevent child maltreatment, perhaps by reducing risk factors such as parental stress and depression.

Paid leave supports equity.

- Discriminatory policies have prevented many families of color from building the savings needed to allow them to take unpaid time off to cope with family events. Thus, the lack of a national paid leave policy disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx families and babies.
- Maternal mortality among Black women is more than three times higher than among white women. Returning to work early interferes with the rest and medical care recommended for new mothers.
- Infant mortality for Black babies is almost twice the national average. Paid leave is shown to decrease infant mortality.

Without paid leave, out of economic necessity, families forego time caring for their babies.

- As of November 2020, only 9 states and DC have passed paid leave laws or ballot initiatives.
- 85% of working people in the United States do not have access to paid family leave through their employers.
- Among employers voluntarily offering paid leave for new mothers, just 9% provided fully paid leave in 2014, a decline from 16% in 2008.

Paid leave policies support employers, taxpayers, and the current and future economy.

- Good beginnings mean reduced expenditures and more time at work. When parents can attend to a child's early medical needs, infant mortality and the occurrence and length of childhood illnesses are reduced, in turn lowering private and public health costs, as well as the need for working parents to take time away from work.
- Time to arrange care means greater productivity at work. Paid leave can give parents and other caregivers time to search for quality child care that meets the unique needs of their families, thereby facilitating greater productivity when they return to their jobs after leave.
- With paid leave, our future workforce is well-nurtured and better equipped. Positive, consistent relationships during a child's early years yield confident individuals who are better equipped for success in school and in life, paving the way for a higher quality workforce and strong economic growth.

Policy Recommendation: Create the national paid family and medical leave program that voters are asking for.

- While some states and localities have adopted paid leave policies, the time parents have to bond with and care for their babies should not be dependent on income, workplace, zip code, or gender. The Administration and Congress should create a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave insurance program, such as the *Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act*, that embodies the following core principles:
 - Accessibility for all working people;
 - A meaningful length of leave—at least 12 weeks;
 - Coverage for the full range of medical and family caregiving needs established in the *Family and Medical Leave Act*;
 - Affordability and cost-effectiveness for workers, employers, and the government;
 - Inclusivity in its definition of “family”; and
 - Protection from employer retaliation for workers who take leave.
- 8 in 10 voters support a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave policy that covers all people who work.