



**Statement for the Record Submitted by
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Hearing on Legislative Proposals for Paid Family and Medical Leave by the Committee on
Ways and Means
Tuesday, January 28, 2020**

March of Dimes is a non-profit, non-partisan, organization that fights for the health of all moms and babies. We are pleased to submit the following statement for the record as the Committee examines legislation that would establish a national paid family leave policy.

Most Americans will face the demands of having a baby, developing a serious illness, or needing to care for a sick loved one at some point in their lives. In those cases, retaining some level of income can mean the difference between being able to maintain stability and financial independence versus facing the challenges of having no income to support themselves and their loved ones. The U.S. is the only industrialized nation that does not offer some form of paid family leave at the national level.

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1990 (FMLA) requires private employers with at least 50 employees and all government agencies regardless of number of employees to offer 12 weeks of leave for childbirth, adoption, or the serious illness of one's self or a close relative. However, that leave is not required to be paid, which represents a significant financial burden for most Americans. In 2016, only 14% of civilian workers had access to paid family leave, according to government surveys.ⁱ

It is paramount that the U.S. join the rest of the world in providing paid family leave to allow working moms and dads to care for a new child. The evidence clearly shows that paid family leave improves infant and maternal health outcomes. An international evaluation of paid leave policies showed that for every increase of 10 weeks of paid maternity leave, there was a 10 percent lower neonatal and infant mortality rate, even after controlling for other known risk factors for infant and child death.ⁱⁱ

Other research has shown the significant benefits paid family leave can have for women and their families, including reducing poverty and improving maternal and child health.

- [Recent research of California's Paid Family Leave policy](#) showed that moms with access to paid family leave had a 10% lower risk of poverty and had 4% higher incomes in the year following a birth.
- Paid family leave programs are associated with lower rates of neonatal and infant death and increased duration of breastfeeding, which can protect babies from infection and illness.

- An [international evaluation](#) of paid leave policies showed that for every increase of 10 weeks of paid maternity leave, there was a 10% lower neonatal and infant mortality rate and a 9% lower rate of mortality in children under age 5, even after controlling for other known risk factors for infant and child death.
- An [evaluation](#) of California's Paid Family Leave policy reported that the median duration of breastfeeding doubled for all new mothers. In addition, the overwhelming majority of businesses reported positive or no impact on productivity.

Paid family leave benefits the economy, as well. A new study funded by March of Dimes' Center for Social Science Research, and conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), underscores the long-term effects of paid family leave on women's participation in the workforce. The study, which analyzed labor market participation among women in California and New Jersey before and after each state implemented a paid family and medical leave system, showed several key findings.ⁱⁱⁱ

- States that implement paid family leave policies found that 20% fewer women leave their jobs in the first year after welcoming a child.
- At five years, up to 50% fewer women leave their jobs.
- Over the long term, paid leave nearly closes the gap in workforce participation between moms of young children and women without minor children.
- For women who do not have access to paid family leave:
 - Nearly 30% of women will drop out of the workforce within a year after welcoming a child;
 - 1 in 5 women will not return to the workforce for over a decade.
- The impact of access to paid leave is particularly pronounced for women with higher levels of education, who saw increases in their labor force participation up to eight years after birth.
- These trends indicate that paid leave is especially important for ensuring that the most educated workers can participate in the workforce.

Given the overwhelming benefits of paid family leave, March of Dimes strongly supports the *Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act* (H.R. 1185/S. 463), which would create an affordable and self-sustaining national system to provide workers with up to 12 weeks of partial income through a family and medical leave insurance fund. The FAMILY Act takes a balanced approach by providing leave to a range of family situations, not just new parents. Leave could be taken by individuals to care for their own serious health conditions, including pregnancy and childbirth recovery, as well as other serious health conditions of a child, parent, spouse or domestic partner, the birth or adoption of a child, and for military caregiving and leave purposes. Both employers and workers would pay into the fund, which would be available to most employees and fair for all employers. Importantly, the fund would not adversely impact participants' future earnings by cutting their retirement benefits.

In December 2019, Congress took an important first step by enacting legislation to provide 12 weeks of paid parental leave for the nation's 2.1 million federal workers who have a new baby or adopt a child. However, this legislation did not include those who need to care for a sick family member. Now, lawmakers must do more to ensure every family has access to paid leave to welcome a new child or manage a serious illness. March of Dimes looks forward to working with the Committee to advance comprehensive paid family leave legislation on bipartisan basis this Congress.

ⁱ Pew Research Center. Access to Paid Family Leave Varies Widely Among Employers, Industries. March 23, 2017.

ⁱⁱ Heyman J, Raub A, Earle A. Creating and Using New Data Sources to Analyze the Relationship Between Social Policy and Global Health: The Case of Maternal Leave. *Public Health Reports*. 2011;126(Suppl 3): 127-134. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150137/pdf/phr126s30127.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jones, K. Reducing maternal labor market detachment: A role for paid family leave. Working Paper. Available at: <https://econpapers.repec.org/paper/amuwpaper/2019-07.htm>.