



**Statement for the Record Submitted by  
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Roundtable on Paid Leave Proposals in the COVID Era by the Senate Committee on Finance  
Paid Leave Working Group**

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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 comments to the Senate Finance Paid Leave Working Group as it examines paid leave proposals that meet the needs of the COVID era. Thank you for your leadership on this important issue, and we urge you and your colleagues to take immediate steps to improve the COVID-19 specific family leave protections and work toward establishing a permanent paid leave program for all American workers.

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. However, the U.S. is the only industrialized nation that does not offer some form of paid leave at the national level. As a result [only 17 percent of civilian workers in America have access to paid family leave](#), including maternity and paternity leave, or caring for a loved one.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities that already existed for our nation's workforce, which exist due to the lack of national, permanent paid family leave protections. But these vulnerabilities have long been known by advocacy organizations like March of Dimes, and have been felt by families everywhere without access to paid family leave. Moreover, the science has been clear for decades – access to paid family leave improves the health of both moms and babies, reduces poverty and dependence on public assistance, and increases women's participation in the workforce:

- [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 and a 9 percent lower rate of mortality in children under age 5, even after controlling for other known risk factors for infant and child death.
- [A seminal study of paid leave duration and health outcomes](#) in 16 European countries between 1969 to 1994 found that a 10-week extension of paid parental leave reduced post neonatal infant mortality (28 days after birth) by 2-3 percent and child fatalities by 1 percent. Job-protected paid leave of 40 weeks showed the greatest mortality reduction.

- [Recent research of California’s Paid Family Leave policy](#) showed that moms with access to paid family leave had a 10 percent lower risk of poverty and had 4 percent higher incomes in the year following a birth.
- [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.
- [A 2012 Rutgers University study on the economic impacts of paid family leave](#) found that women who take paid leave are 39 percent less likely to receive public assistance and 40 percent less likely to receive food stamps in the year following the birth of a child, when compared to moms who do not take any leave. Not only is paid leave associated with lower spending on public assistance, it also reduces the chance that a family receiving public assistance will increase its use of public funding following a child’s birth.
- [A new study on paid family leave policies and women’s participation in the workforce](#), funded by the March of Dimes Center for Social Science Research and conducted by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, found that states that have implemented paid leave policies saw a **20 percent reduction in the number of women leaving their jobs** in the first years after welcoming a child, and up to a 50 percent reduction after five years. In addition, the study showed the following key findings:
  - 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 percent will drop out of the workforce within a year after welcoming a child, and 1 in 5 of women will not return to the workforce for over a decade; and
  - The impact of access to paid leave is particularly pronounced for women with high levels of education, who saw increases in their labor force participation up to 8 years after birth.

Earlier this year, Congress provided temporary protections for some moms, babies, and families by passing the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). March of Dimes is grateful Congress took bold action to provide paid sick and family leave for some workers impacted by COVID-19.

With states beginning to relax restrictions put in place to flatten the curve and reduce the spread of COVID-19, the effort to reopen the economy – while necessary – will continue to expose American workers and their workplaces to the coronavirus. Despite our best efforts to improve access to testing, establish contact tracing systems, and implement social distancing and other safety guidance backed by science, many Americans will nevertheless continue to be exposed. We are already seeing this happen in states like New Hampshire, Louisiana, Oregon, Florida, and South Carolina, among others, which have experienced [a sudden increase in COVID-19 cases in recent days and weeks](#).

No one can say for sure how long the economic disruption caused by COVID-19 will last, nor what the long term impact will be on our economy, jobs, and workplaces. However, we do know the need for paid family leaves protections will remain long after the world recovers from the pandemic and we have settled into our “new normal,” whatever that may look like.

As the Working Group continues to examine this issue in light of COVID-19, March of Dimes urges support for both short-term improvements to the FFCRA paid leave programs, and in the long-term for a permanent national paid leave program.

**To improve the protections established in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, March of Dimes advocates for the paid family leave provisions in H.R. 6800, The Heroes Act.**

**Specifically:**

- Extending the availability of Emergency Family and Medical Leave benefits from December 31, 2020 to December 31, 2021;
- Eliminating the large employer exemption;
- Removing the authority of the Secretary of Labor to exempt coverage for employees of businesses with fewer than 50 workers; and
- Removing the ability to exempt health care providers and emergency responders from the right to paid leave.

**To provide all workers access to paid family leave, March of Dimes advocates for the passage of S. 463 / H.R. 1185, The Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act. This legislation:**

- Creates 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;
- Takes a balanced approach by providing leave to a range of family situations, not just new parents;
- Allows leave to be taken by individuals to care for their own serious health condition, including:
  - Pregnancy and childbirth recovery,
  - 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;
- Provides a fair system by which both employers and workers pay into the fund, which would be available to most employees; and
- Does not adversely impact participants future earnings by cutting their retirement benefits.

There is also strong support for these policies across demographic and party lines with 75 percent of voters, including 87 percent of Democrats, 70 percent of Republicans, 78 percent of moderate Republicans, and 71 percent of Independents, supporting a national paid family and medical leave law, [according to polling from the National Partnership for Women & Families.](#)

Once again, March of Dimes commends the Working Group for its commitment to finding solutions that will improve access to paid leave, we are eager to work with you and we stand ready to support your collective efforts in any way we can.