

PAID FAMILY LEAVE



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 United States 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.¹

Key Elements of Paid Family Leave

March of Dimes supports the establishment of paid family leave systems that make benefits available to all workers while also distributing the responsibility for funding this system among employers. Such systems recognize that society shares an obligation to support new families as well as individuals who are sick themselves or need to care for others.

Specifically, bills to promote paid family leave should:

Cover the maximum number of workers. Paid family leave systems should cover as many employees as possible, including individuals who are self-employed, intermittently employed (such as through the gig economy), and people who are early in their working life.

Create shared responsibility among all employers. Systems should be designed to spread the responsibility for paid leave broadly, which will also help reduce the cost to individual employers and workers.

Not disadvantage certain groups. Systems should be carefully devised to ensure they do not unfairly exclude or disadvantage certain groups, such as younger people or the self-employed.

Cover a range of needs. Paid family leave should be available for a range of situations, including birth or adoption of a child, an individual's serious medical condition or that of family member, and potentially other significant life events that challenge families.

HIGHLIGHTS

- March of Dimes supports paid family leave systems that make benefits available to all workers while also distributing the funding responsibility among employers.
- Lack of paid leave after childbirth, adoption or a serious illness represents a significant financial burden for most Americans.
- Only 14% of civilian workers have access to paid family leave.
- Paid leave is associated with better birth outcomes and greater duration of breastfeeding.

Paid Family Leave Systems

March of Dimes supports the establishment of paid family leave systems that make benefits available to all workers while also distributing the responsibility for funding this system among employers. Such systems recognize that society shares an obligation to support new families as well as individuals who are sick themselves or need to care for others.

An international evaluation of paid leave policies showed that an increase of 10 weeks of paid maternity leave resulted in 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.²

In California, an evaluation of the state's paid family leave policy reported that the median duration of breastfeeding doubled for all new mothers who used it.³ California's policy applies to nearly all employers regardless of business size. In addition, the overwhelming majority of businesses reported positive or no impact of paid family leave on productivity (88.5%).³

Paid family leave systems already exist in California, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Washington, New York and D.C., and bills have been introduced in other states.

References

¹ Pew Research Center. [Access to Paid Family Leave Varies Widely Among Employers, Industries](#). March 23, 2017.

² 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.

³ Appelbaum E, Milkman R. Leaves that Pay: [Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California](#), 2011.