

May 18, 2021

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Committee hearing on “Paid Leave for Working Families: Examining Access, Options, and Impacts

Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Members of the Committee,

We, the undersigned maternal and child health organizations and their partners, would like to thank the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions for holding this hearing on paid leave. We strongly urge Congress to support a comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy to support optimal child development, improve maternal health, reduce disparities and enable future generations to live healthier lives.

Unlike in most other countries, in the U.S. workers are often unable to take time off from work to care for a new child, critically ill loved-one, or tend to their own medical needs without sacrificing the income they need to support their families. This has profound and lasting impacts on maternal and child health in the United States. Because pregnancy, childbirth and the transition to parenthood can be physically and psychologically demanding, people need time to care for themselves and their health. Paid leave is a critical tool to support healthier pregnancies, better birth outcomes, more successful breastfeeding and both physical and mental health in the postpartum period. Additionally, inclusive and comprehensive policies can reduce the inequities in access to paid leave, helping to bridge the racial and ethnic disparities in overall maternal and child health outcomes.

Beyond allowing for physical recovery after childbirth, paid time off from work is essential to providing a strong foundation for mom, baby and their family to thrive. Science tells us that babies’ brains are nourished by time spent with parents and caregivers. Policies that enable parents to spend time nurturing and caring for their babies—particularly in the early weeks after birth and for babies that are born pre-term, low birth weight or with illness—are critical to the healthy cognitive, social and emotional development of children.

The need for a comprehensive, equitable paid leave policy has taken on new salience in the past year, as many workers struggled to take time away from work to recover from COVID-19 or care for a sick loved one without risking their paycheck and their livelihood. The pandemic has drawn attention to and expanded preexisting disparities, creating both a health crisis and an economic crisis that has disproportionately impacted women, low-income families, and families of color. Now more than ever, it is clear: paid leave is a public health imperative.

It is time for Congress to act, and to provide all families with the comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy they need. We are grateful to Chair Murray and the Committee for holding this important hearing and we look forward to working with you to advance a comprehensive, national paid leave policy to meet the needs of American families.

Sincerely,

1,000 Days
2020 Mom
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of University Women (AAUW)
Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs
Better Life Lab at New America
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for Public Justice
Center for Reproductive Rights
Child Care Aware of America
Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity & Reproductive Rights (COLOR)
DC Dorothy Day Catholic Worker
Every Mother Counts
The HOPE Registry
Jennifer Bush-Lawson Foundation
Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition
Maine Women's Lobby
March for Moms
March of Dimes
Mom Congress
MomsRising
NARAL Pro-Choice America
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health
National Birth Equity Collaborative
National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE)
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Jewish Women Los Angeles
National Partnership for Women and Families
National WIC Association
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nurse-Family Partnership
Ohio Women's Public Policy Network
Paid Leave for All
Palladium
Perinatal Health Equity Foundation
Physicians for Reproductive Health
PL+US: Paid Leave for the United States
Poder Latinx
Shriver Center on Poverty Law
SisterSong: National Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)
RESULTS
Union for Reform Judaism
US Breastfeeding Committee
Women of Reform Judaism
Women's Law Project
The Womxn Project
YWCA USA