

Work and Family **Agenda** for the 112th Congress

JANUARY 2012

Every day, working women and men in the United States struggle to meet the dual demands of work and family because their workplaces are without basic family friendly policies. It is long past time for workplaces to reflect the needs of 21st century working families, which for many include the ability to care for children, family members and elderly relatives while also being productive, responsible employees.

The National Partnership for Women & Families is leading the fight for policies that make our nation and its workplaces more family friendly. When women do better, families do better and our nation prospers.

Paid Sick Days

Nearly 40 million private sector workers are not offered a single paid sick day to recover from common, short-term illnesses. An additional 4.2 million don't have access to paid sick days because they haven't been on the job long enough to be eligible. Millions more do not have paid sick days they can use to care for a sick child or family member.

Without paid sick days, workers are forced to make impossible choices when illness strikes: stay home; lose pay and risk their jobs; or go to work sick, risk their health and spread disease to their co-workers and communities. A national paid sick days standard would help working families meet their health and financial needs, while boosting business productivity and improving worker retention.

The National Partnership encourages members of Congress to support the Healthy Families Act, which would create a national paid sick days standard.

Three-quarters of adults support a law that would allow workers to earn a minimum number of paid sick days – and nine in 10 favor a specific proposal providing up to seven paid sick days per year.

— *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences.*
National Opinion Research Center at the
University of Chicago, 2010

The Healthy Families Act (H.R. 1876/S. 984) would:

- ▶ Allow workers in businesses with 15 or more employees to **earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days each year** to be used to recover from their own illness, access preventive care or provide care for a sick family member;

- ▶ Allow workers who are **victims of domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault to use their paid sick days** for recovery or to seek assistance; and
- ▶ **Allow employers that already provide paid sick days or paid time off to maintain their existing policies**, as long as they meet the minimums set forth in the bill for amount of time, types of use and method of use.

Paid Family and Medical Leave Programs

A mere 11 percent of workers in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employers and fewer than 40 percent have access to employer-provided, short-term disability insurance to use when they have a serious medical problem. Yet, at some point in their lives, nearly all workers will need to take time away from work to deal with a serious personal or family illness, or to care for a new child. Laws that provide *paid* family and medical leave allow workers to meet these needs without jeopardizing their economic security.

Nearly eight in 10 U.S. adults (78 percent) say that family and maternity leave is a “very important” labor standard for workers.

— *Paid Sick Days: Attitudes and Experiences*. National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, 2010

The National Partnership encourages members of Congress to support the following proposals that would provide working families with access to paid family and medical leave.

- ▶ **A national family and medical leave insurance proposal** which would allow workers to earn a portion of their pay while they take a limited amount of time away from work to care for a newborn, newly adopted child or newly placed foster child, care for a family member with a serious health condition, or address their own serious health condition.
- ▶ **A state paid leave fund** within the U.S. Department of Labor would provide competitive grants to states to establish paid leave programs that meet the needs of working families.
- ▶ The **Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act** (HR 616) would provide four weeks of paid parental leave to federal workers while they are on Family and Medical Leave Act leave for the birth or adoption of a child.

Expanding the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

The FMLA is currently the only federal law that helps workers meet the dual demands of work and family. The National Partnership is proud to have led the fight for its enactment. This groundbreaking legislation has been used more than 100 million times by workers who have taken time off to care for their families or their own serious health conditions. The FMLA was an important start, but the law has significant gaps that leave roughly half of workers ineligible for FMLA leave. The law also fails to recognize that, in today’s families,

workers are caring for siblings, grandparents and other close relatives – individuals who are not covered by the FMLA.

The National Partnership urges members of Congress to support the following bills that would expand access to the FMLA.

- ▶ The **Family and Medical Leave Enhancement Act** (H.R.1440) would amend the FMLA to cover businesses with 25 or more employees (the FMLA currently applies to employers with 50 or more employees) and expand the reasons a worker is allowed to take FMLA leave to include parental and family involvement leave and routine family medical needs.
- ▶ The **Family and Medical Leave Inclusion Act** (H.R.2364/S.1283) would expand the definition of family member to allow FMLA leave to care for a domestic partner, parent-in-law, adult child, sibling, grandchild, or grandparent.
- ▶ The **Domestic Violence Leave Act** (H.R.3151) would allow employees to use FMLA leave to address domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking and their effects, in addition to using leave to care for domestic partners with serious health conditions.
- ▶ The **Parental Bereavement Act** (S.1358) would amend the FMLA to entitle an eligible employee to up to 12 weeks of leave to grieve the death of a son or daughter.

Workplace Flexibility

America's workplaces are out of sync with 21st century society. Children get sick, parents age and health emergencies arise — but many workplaces offer little flexibility to help working women and men care for their families and still succeed at their jobs. This is particularly true for low-wage and hourly workers, who are even less likely than higher income, salaried workers to have flexibility. Workers in this country need greater flexibility and control over scheduling, alternative schedules and overtime, parity for those working part-time, more telecommuting opportunities, and support to meet after-school, child and elder care needs.

The National Partnership encourages members of Congress to support proposals that give workers greater control over the time, place and duration of their work.

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at www.NationalPartnership.org.

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