



To: Interested Parties  
From: National Partnership for Women & Families  
Re: Paid Family and Medical Leave is a Winning Issue  
Date: May 27, 2016

---

America's families are feeling squeezed. Wage growth has been stagnant, and income inequality is growing. Families have to make do with less. And polls show that voters want their elected officials to fight for them – to provide real solutions to the challenges they face so they have more economic security and opportunity. Paid family and medical leave is one of those solutions, and there are clear signs that it is a winning issue for the elected officials and candidates for elected office who support it.

**Paid family and medical leave is a winning political issue because it is personal for voters.**

Access to family and medical leave affects some of the most important moments in people's lives. Paid leave makes it possible for new mothers to recover and care for new babies; for fathers to take an active role at the outset of a child's life; for sons and daughters to hold the hand of a dying parent; and for everyone to reduce financial hardship and avoid untenable choices between getting critical care for serious illnesses or soldiering through work without respite.

**At some point, virtually everyone – women and men – will need to take care of a new child, a seriously ill parent or partner, or their own serious health issue, yet access to paid leave is all too rare.** Just 13 percent of the U.S. workforce has paid family leave through their employers and less than 40 percent has personal medical leave through an employer's temporary disability program.<sup>1</sup> For low-wage workers, paid leave is even more uncommon – and taking unpaid leave is not a realistic option. This is why nearly one-quarter of new moms are back at work within two weeks of giving birth and why many workers are forced to choose between the jobs they need and the families they love.<sup>2</sup>

**When working women and men go without paid leave, everyone – workers, families, businesses and the economy – suffers.** Whether measured by reduced labor force participation and lower wages, reduced retirement savings, poorer health, higher likelihood of public assistance use, higher turnover costs for employers or lower overall GDP, the national costs of inaction when it comes to guaranteeing working people access to paid leave are high for the United States.

**A national paid family and medical leave program enjoys broad and intense support among voters across all demographics and ideologies.** Strong public support reflects the stake that everyone has in creating a national policy that assures access to paid family and

medical leave for all people who need time from their jobs for serious family and medical needs, no matter where they live, their employer or what job they hold.

## WHY PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE?

### A PERSONAL ISSUE FOR VOTERS

- ▶ **Caring for loved ones or dealing with personal health issues are near-universal experiences for voters.** During some of the happiest and scariest times, family members struggle with how to take care of a new baby or adopted child, an older parent or themselves without financial hardship. Tens of millions of people's needs are not being met by the current patchwork of policies, in which access to paid family leave depends solely on working for a high-road employer or living in one of four states – California, New Jersey, New York (starting in 2018) or Rhode Island – that have paid leave programs.
- ▶ **Voters report substantial financial insecurity that may fuel concerns about dealing with serious family and medical needs.** Recent research shows that people in only about half of America's households (54 percent) report that they could cover a \$400 emergency expense without selling something or borrowing money.<sup>3</sup> It is no wonder, then, that two-thirds of voters, across demographic and party lines, said after the 2014 midterm elections that they or their families would likely face significant financial hardship if they had a serious illness, had to care for a family member with a serious illness, or had a new child.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ **The benefits of paid leave are tangible and easy for voters to understand.** Unlike many economic policy solutions that tend to be abstract – e.g., investing in infrastructure or developing a stronger manufacturing base – a paid leave fund is a *concrete policy solution with tangible benefits* for women and men, children and seniors, businesses and the economy. It is easy to explain how paid leave will make voters' lives easier. And, in fact, paid leave does boost families' financial independence and reduces taxpayer spending on safety net programs. Women and men who take paid leave for a child's birth are about 40 percent less likely than those who take no paid leave to report using public assistance or food stamps in the following year.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ **Shared personal experiences can help elected officials and candidates connect with voters.** Everyone likely has an example of struggling to care for a new baby or aging parent – or having children or grandchildren who are dealing with the stress of managing job and family. When elected officials and candidates share their stories, they show that they can relate to and empathize with voters on this very basic, human aspect of life. And when they express support for a paid family and medical leave program, they show that they understand the needs of voters and their families. As discussed below, by more than a seven-to-one ratio, voters say that an elected official's support for a national paid family and medical leave law signals that they are more likely to understand the needs of voters and their families.

### A POPULAR ISSUE WITH VOTERS<sup>6</sup>

- ▶ **More than three-quarters of likely 2016 voters (76 percent) say they favor a national law that would establish a paid family and medical leave program,** including 61 percent who say they “strongly favor” such a program. Support for a

national paid leave fund is broad. Notably, equivalent shares of voters say that updating America’s existing law, which provides only unpaid leave, to provide *paid* family and medical leave is *important* – 79 percent of voters say it is important; 57 percent say it is “very important.”

- ▶ **Both men and women express strong support for a national paid leave law.** Although women demonstrate stronger and more intense support (85 percent favor, including 71 percent who “strongly” favor) than men, men are also overwhelmingly supportive (66 percent favor, including 51 percent who “strongly” favor).
- ▶ **A growing body of research suggests men’s concerns about conflicts between work and family are equal to or exceed women’s concerns.** These findings likely explain why men under the age of 50 (70 percent favor, including 56 percent who “strongly” favor), male college graduates (68 percent favor, including 55 percent who “strongly” favor) and unmarried men – who may have parents in need of care but no partner to help (69 percent favor, including 53 percent who “strongly” favor) – are particularly supportive of a national paid family and medical leave law.
- ▶ **Women – especially those who tend to feel financially squeezed and are caregivers – hold particularly intense, positive feelings about a national paid leave law.**
  - ▶ Seventy-one percent of both **women under 50** and **women 50 and older** say they *strongly* favor a national paid leave law, and **overall support among women under 50 is close to universal at 90 percent.**
  - ▶ Seventy-three percent of **women without a college degree** *strongly* favor a national law, as do 69 percent of **women college graduates.**
  - ▶ Three-quarters of **unmarried women** (76 percent) are *strongly* favorable, which likely reflects the double bind of breadwinning and caregiving that is especially challenging without access to paid leave.
  - ▶ Overwhelming shares of **women in the Northeast, Midwest and South** are also *strongly* favorable (79 percent, 71 percent and 75 percent, respectively).
  - ▶ **Other core groups of voters who tend not to have access to paid leave are intensely supportive of a national paid leave policy.** These include **voters under 30** (68 percent *strongly* favor), **African American voters** (85 percent *strongly* favor), **Latino voters** (67 percent *strongly* favor) and voters with **household incomes less than \$30,000 per year** (71 percent *strongly* favor).
  - ▶ Nearly all **Democrats** (92 percent favor, including 82 percent who “strongly” favor) and 75 percent of **independents** (58 percent “strongly” favor) favor a national paid leave law, as do 69 percent of **Republican women** (41 percent “strongly” favor). Among Republicans overall, 57 percent say they favor a law that would create a national paid family and medical leave fund, including 47 percent of Republican men (33 percent “strongly” favor).
- ▶ **Voters say that an elected official’s position on paid leave signals their understanding of the challenges facing voters and their families.** A full half of the electorate (52 percent) says that they would be more likely to feel that an elected official understands their own and their families’ needs if that official supports a paid family and medical leave law. Only *seven* percent of voters say that an elected

official's support for a national paid leave law makes them *less* likely to think that official understands their needs and the needs of their families.

- ▶ **Women** (60 percent), including **women under 50** (63 percent), **women with a college degree** (62 percent), **women in the South** (70 percent), **unmarried women** (68 percent), and **women with children under 18** (72 percent), as well as **African American voters** (74 percent), feel particular affinity with elected officials who support paid leave.

## **MEDIA IMPRESSIONS REINFORCE VOTERS' PERCEPTIONS**

- ▶ **Paid leave is receiving significant media attention both nationally and locally.**<sup>7</sup> There is a strong, evolving narrative that the United States is woefully behind when it comes to paid family and medical leave, that families are struggling and that it is time for government and businesses to take action.
- ▶ **Lawmakers are receiving positive media coverage for supporting paid leave.** Media reports in local markets across the country feature positive representations of lawmakers who are standing with workers and their families, supportive businesses and the medical community in supporting public paid leave proposals.
  - ▶ In **North Dakota**, U.S. Senators Heidi Heitkamp and Kirsten Gillibrand received substantial positive print and television attention for a series of events focusing on paid leave. They were joined by parents as well as a supportive business owner who spoke about the likely benefits of a national paid leave program for his business and employees.<sup>8</sup> The events followed a wave of positive press marking Senator Heitkamp's announcement that she supports the Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act, a national paid leave proposal.<sup>9</sup>
  - ▶ In **Ohio**, state lawmakers received positive attention around the introduction of a paid family and medical leave proposal.<sup>10</sup> Press reports examined the human toll of the status quo and put the proposal in national context.
  - ▶ In **Connecticut**, events attended by working families and businesses drew substantial coverage – and coverage of opposition arguments made by organized business interests were overshadowed by the media's focus on stories of need and benefits.<sup>11</sup> Federal-level Connecticut policymakers have received similarly positive press for their support of paid family and medical leave.<sup>12</sup>

\* \* \*

Championing paid family and medical leave sends a powerful message to voters. It is sound economic policy that boosts working people, families, businesses and the economy. The National Partnership for Women & Families is ready to assist lawmakers who want to explore and elevate this key issue.

---

1 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015, September). *Employee Benefits in the United States National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2015* (Tables 32 and 16). Retrieved 15 May 2016, from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2015/ownership/civilian/table16a.pdf>

2 Klerman, J., Daley, K., & Pozniak, A. (2012, September 7). *Family and Medical Leave in 2012: Technical Report*. Abt Associates Publication. Retrieved 15 March 2016, from <http://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/fmla/FMLA-2012-Technical-Report.pdf>

3 Federal Reserve Board. (2016, May). *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2015*. Retrieved 25 May 2016, from Retrieved 26 May 2016, from <http://www.federalreserve.gov/2015-report-economic-well-being-us-households-201605.pdf>

- 
- 4 Telephone survey of 1,200 registered likely voters nationwide on landlines and cell phones conducted November 2-4, 2014, by Lake Research Partners and The Tarrance Group. Retrieved 18 May 2016, from <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/lake-research-and-tarrance-group-2014-midterm-election-omnibus-poll-results.pdf>
- 5 Houser, L., & Vartanian, T. (2012). *Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impact of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public*. Center for Women and Work at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. Retrieved 18 May 2016, from [http://www.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/Pay\\_Matters\\_-\\_Positive\\_Economic\\_Impacts\\_of\\_Paid\\_Family\\_L.pdf?docID=9681](http://www.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/Pay_Matters_-_Positive_Economic_Impacts_of_Paid_Family_L.pdf?docID=9681)
- 6 Telephone survey of 808 likely 2016 voters nationwide including landline and cell phones conducted January 28-31, 2016, by Caravan ORC and Lake Research Partners. Questionnaire available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/fmla-23-lrp-poll-questionnaire.pdf>. Crosstabs available upon request from the National Partnership for Women & Families. This memo presents a deep dive into one recent national survey, but the topline results reported here are consistent with public polling on paid leave conducted by the *New York Times/CBS News*, the *AP-GfK* poll, NORC/University of Chicago, the Center for American Progress and multiple state polls.
- 7 Media coverage of paid leave has been increasingly steadily in recent years. The Nexis database shows 1,138 mentions in U.S. newspapers and wires of "paid family leave," "paid medical leave" or "paid family and medical leave" in 2014; 2,453 mentions in 2015; and 2,910 mentions in just the first six months (through June 30) of 2016.
- 8 Springer, P. (2016, April 1). Heitkamp pushes paid individual and family leave for all employees. *Grand Forks Herald*. Retrieved 18 May 2016, from <http://www.grandforksherald.com/news/politics/4000331-heitkamp-pushes-paid-individual-and-family-leave-all-employees>; Cremer, A. (2016, April 2). Touting policy: Heitkamp, Gillibrand support national family/medical leave policy. *The Jamestown Sun*. Retrieved 18 May 2016, from <http://www.jamestownsun.com/news/local/4000631-touting-policy-heitkamp-gillibrand-support-national-family-medical-leave-policy>
- 9 Mc Feely, M. (2016, February 6). Paid family leave something Sen. Heitkamp can sink her teeth into. *The Dickinson Press*. Retrieved 18 May 2016, from <http://www.thedickinsonpress.com/opinion/columns/3942073-mcfeely-paid-family-leave-something-sen-heitkamp-can-sink-her-teeth>
- 10 Shaw, M. (2016, April 6). New bill proposal seeks paid medical, maternity leave for Ohioans (Video). *NewsNet 5 Cleveland*. Retrieved 18 May 2016, from <http://www.newsnet5.com/lifestyle/new-bill-proposals-seeks-paid-medical-maternity-leave-for-ohioans>; Borchardt, J. (2016, April 5). Ohioans could receive paid maternity, sick leave in new bill. *Cleveland.com*. Retrieved 18 May 2016, from [http://www.cleveland.com/open/index.ssf/2016/04/ohio\\_paid\\_family\\_leave\\_bill\\_in.html](http://www.cleveland.com/open/index.ssf/2016/04/ohio_paid_family_leave_bill_in.html)
- 11 Ramunni, K. (2016, April 6). Hamden business owner, employees come out in support of paid family and medical leave bill. *New Haven Register*. Retrieved 18 May 2016, from <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20160406/hamden-business-owner-employees-come-out-in-support-of-paid-family-and-medical-leave-bill>; Schecker, J. (2016, April 7). State Lawmakers Consider Paid Family and Medical Leave System (Video). *NBC Connecticut*. Retrieved 18 May 2016, from <http://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/local/State-Lawmakers-Consider-Paid-Family-and-Medical-Leave-System-374939431.html>
- 12 Ramunni, K. (2015, May 28). DeLauro, US Labor Secretary Thomas Perez stump for paid family leave in North Branford. *New Haven Register*. Retrieved 18 May 2016, from <http://www.nhregister.com/article/NH/20150528/NEWS/150529454>
-