



TO: Interested Media  
FROM: [Alex Nseir](#), Communications Specialist, 202-986-2600  
DATE: December 11, 2019  
RE: **Paid Family and Medical Leave: What You Need to Know Before the White House Summit**

The question of whether our country needs a paid leave policy enjoys a level of consensus that is increasingly rare in Washington today. Across party lines, lawmakers and voters agree that working people need time to address caregiving needs without facing financial ruin.

The question now is not if the United States will enact national paid leave, but when. It's an exciting time, but approaching the finish line means the policy landscape has become more crowded and potentially confusing. Not every paid leave proposal addresses working people's needs and some could do more harm than good.

Below you'll find answers to critical questions on paid family and medical leave policy – an issue that will only grow in importance in 2020 and beyond.

### **The Problem**

Only [19 percent](#) of working people have access to paid family leave through an employer, and just 40 percent have paid medical leave through an employer-provided short-term disability program, leaving millions behind when they need time to give or receive care. While the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides unpaid, job-protected leave, less than [60 percent](#) of workers are eligible for FMLA, and less than [40 percent](#) are both eligible and can afford to go weeks without a paycheck.

Twenty-seven years after the FMLA's passage, it's time for the next step. When people cannot take the time they need to welcome a new child, hold the hand of a dying parent or seek treatment for cancer without risking financial ruin, it hurts workers' economic security and health. It also costs businesses in employee productivity, and turnover and replacement costs. It costs our economy in reduced women's labor force participation.

### **The United States Is the Only High-Wealth Country Without a National Paid Leave Policy**

Our nation is one of the only countries in the world that doesn't provide national paid leave. While [eight states and the District of Columbia](#) have enacted statewide paid family and medical insurance policies, millions of people still must make impossible choices between care and a job. Access to this critical benefit should not be based on geography.

## **American Families Overwhelmingly Support Paid Leave**

A national survey conducted in 2018 by research firms PerryUndem (non-partisan) and Bellwether (Republican) found that more than [8 in 10 voters](#) (84 percent) support a comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy that covers all working people for all caregiving needs including welcoming a new child, caring for a seriously ill loved one or a personal medical issue. Democrats, Republicans and independents all prefer the funding model of shared contributions between employers and employees. This model is currently the one used in the [Family And Medical Insurance Leave \(FAMILY\) Act](#), a bill before Congress that would offer comprehensive paid leave. Only 3 percent of voters prefer funding paid leave for new parents through Social Security.

## **It's Already Working**

Evidence from the [four states](#) with paid family and medical leave programs in place shows that these policies have clearly met a need and had positive impacts on workers and their families, with neutral or positive effects on businesses. A growing number of the [largest private sector companies](#) across industries recognize the benefits of paid leave and are [calling for a national policy](#) while enacting their own programs. But access to paid leave based on geography or winning the “boss lottery,” is not a working solution. The piecemeal approach to leave means the majority of people still do not have dedicated, job-protected time to care, and there are disparities based on income, industry and geography.

## **Federal policies that working people support currently before Congress**

The bipartisan [Family And Medical Insurance Leave \(FAMILY\) Act](#) (introduced by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.-3) since 2013) provides up to 12 weeks of partially paid leave for family caregiving and personal medical needs and is funded by small payroll contributions from employers and employees. The FAMILY Act is modeled after [programs](#) that are currently in effect in California, New Jersey, Rhode Island and New York.

## **Half-measures**

The New Parents Act and Child Rearing and Development Leave Empowerment (CRADLE) Act, both introduced for the first time in the 116th Congress, would give new parents the option to [cut their own Social Security retirement benefits](#) in exchange for paid parental leave.

The [Advancing Support for Working Families Act](#), introduced just last week by Sens. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-Ariz.) and Reps. Colin Allred (D-Texas-32) and Elise Stefanik (R-N.Y.-21), would not provide paid leave. The proposal gives parents the option to claim a temporary increase in their child tax credit of up to \$5,000 in the first year after a child's birth or adoption in exchange for a decade or more of financial penalties, with no guarantee of leave or job protection.

**To talk to one of our policy experts, contact Alex Nseir at [anseir@nationalpartnership.org](mailto:anseir@nationalpartnership.org) (or 202-986-2600).**

*The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at [NationalPartnership.org](http://NationalPartnership.org).*