Paid Leave Means 
A Stronger Iowa

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Most working people in the United States do not have paid family leave through their jobs,¹ including about 80 percent — about 1.4 million workers — in Iowa. Even unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 64 percent of Iowans.² The lack of paid leave exacerbates the state’s economic and care challenges — from the rising cost of living, to a scarcity of reproductive and maternal health care, to an aging population, with devastating costs for Iowans and their families, public health and the economy.

Impossible choices between work and family are hurting Iowa’s economy, and women suffer most. Paid leave means people — especially women — aren’t forced to leave the labor force to care for their families or health.

> In Iowa, there is a nine percentage-point gap in labor force participation between women and men.³
> Nationally, if women participated in the U.S. labor force at the same rate as women in countries with paid leave, our economy would benefit from more than $650 billion in additional economic activity each year.⁴
> In Iowa, a typical worker who takes four weeks of unpaid leave loses more than $3,000 in income.⁵ As the cost of living rises, income loss hits families especially hard.
> Paid leave improves employee retention, morale and productivity, reducing turnover for employers of all sizes and boosting the economy. But small employers often cannot provide the benefit — and universal paid leave would help them do that.⁶

Iowans are caught between their work and family responsibilities. Paid leave means not having to choose between job and family.

> About 36,800 children are born in Iowa each year, and in 79 percent of all Iowa households with children — nearly 557,000 homes — all parents report to work.⁷
> Women’s wages support their households. In Iowa, 79 percent of Black mothers, 53 percent of white mothers, 52 percent of AAPI mothers and 51 percent of Latina mothers are key family breadwinners. State-level data is limited, but nationally 64 percent of Native American mothers are breadwinners.⁸
Women make up nearly half of Iowa’s labor force (47 percent) and more than one-quarter of its business owners (28 percent).9
Across the country, many men want to play a larger role in caring for their children, but unsupportive policies and stigma hold them back.10

Iowa families’ care needs are increasing. Paid leave means older adults and people with disabilities can provide and receive care, and our care workforce is more resilient.

- Older workers and older adults are more likely to experience serious medical conditions that require care.11
- One-quarter of Iowa workers are 55 and older,12 and in the next 20 years, the share of Iowa’s population age 65 and older will grow by more than one-tenth.13
- About 47 percent of Iowa nursing homes have a shortage of direct care workers.14 Paid leave reduces nursing home utilization and can help recruitment and retention of care workers.15
- An estimated 115,000 Iowans report having long-term COVID-19 symptoms that affect their daily activities.16 Paid leave helps family caregivers and people with disabilities (who are often caregivers themselves) manage their health and care needs while maintaining their income and employment.17

Iowans need a common sense, national paid leave program. We recommend one that:
- includes all workers, no matter where they live or work or what kind of job they have;
- replaces enough income that workers at any income level can afford leave;
- provides enough time for workers to meet their care and health needs;
- covers the range of major needs workers face, including addressing their own health conditions, caring for seriously ill, injured or disabled family members and welcoming newborn, newly adopted or foster children;
- provides education and outreach to ease implementation for workers and small businesses;
- has a sustainable funding source that is affordable for workers, employers and the government without harming other essential programs, such as Social Security or the Child Tax Credit.

National paid family and medical leave means a stronger economy, healthier families and businesses, and greater equality for all women and families.

To learn more, visit NationalPartnership.org/PaidLeave.

2 Diversitydatakids.org. (2023, January). *Indicators of FMLA Eligibility and Affordability for Working Adults*. Retrieved 12 January 2023, from Brandeis University, The Heller School, Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy website: https://data.diversitydatakids.org/dataset?vocab_Subtopic=FMLA&ga=2.14449139.551199344.1673292061-1693714331.1656615545; Workers are considered unable to take unpaid FMLA leave because they are either ineligible based on employer size or job tenure requirements or because 12 weeks of lost wages from unpaid leave would result in their family income dropping to or below 200 percent of the Supplemental Poverty Measure.


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.

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