Paid Leave Means A Stronger North Carolina

Most working people in the United States do not have paid family leave through their jobs, including about 76 percent — about 4,007,000 workers — in North Carolina. Even unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 65 percent of North Carolinians. The lack of paid leave exacerbates the state’s economic and care challenges — from the cost of living, to a scarcity of reproductive and maternal health care, to an aging population, with devastating costs for North Carolinians and their families, public health and the economy.

Impossible choices between work and family are hurting North Carolina’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.

If women in North Carolina participated in the labor force at the same rate as women in countries with paid leave, there would be an estimated 180,000 additional workers in the state and $5.7 billion more wages earned statewide.

Nationally, if women participated in the U.S. labor force at the same rate as in Germany and Canada, our economy would benefit from more than $775 billion in additional economic activity each year.

In North Carolina, a typical worker who takes four weeks of unpaid leave loses more than $3,200 in income.

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.

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

About 121,400 children are born in North Carolina each year, and in 70 percent of all North Carolina households with children — nearly 1,516,000 homes — all parents report to work.

Women’s wages support their households. In North Carolina, 80 percent of Black mothers, 45 percent of Latina mothers, 50 percent of white mothers and 40 percent of AAPI mothers are key family breadwinners.
State-level data is limited, but nationally 64 percent of Native American mothers are breadwinners. Women make up nearly half North Carolina’s labor force (48 percent) and more than one-quarter of its business owners (28 percent). Across the country, many men want to play a larger role in caring for their children, but unsupportive policies and stigma hold them back.

North Carolina families’ care needs are increasing. Paid leave means older adults and disabled people can provide and receive care, and our care workforce is more resilient.

- Nearly one-quarter of North Carolina workers are 55 and older, and in the next 20 years, North Carolina’s population aged 65 and older will grow by 569,000.
- Nationwide, nearly one third of all adults aged 55-64 — and 41 percent of older Black women and 43 percent of older Latinas — hold a physically demanding job, which may exacerbate or cause serious medical conditions that require care, particularly in older workers and workers with disabilities. In North Carolina, that would mean 285,300 older workers, 37,100 older Black women workers and 6,600 older Latina workers.
- About 36 percent of North Carolina nursing homes have a shortage of direct care workers. Paid leave reduces nursing home utilization and can help recruitment and retention of care workers.
- An estimated 981,000 North Carolinians report having long-term COVID-19 symptoms that affect their daily activities. Paid leave is a critical support as we continue through this mass disabling event, which disproportionately impacts women, people of color and workers with low incomes.
- Paid leave helps family caregivers and disabled people (who are often caregivers themselves) manage their health and care needs while maintaining their income and employment.

North Carolinians 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 and 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.

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.

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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