Paid Leave Means A Stronger South Dakota

FEBRUARY 2024

Most working people in the United States do not have paid family leave through their jobs, including about 79 percent — about 383,000 workers — in South Dakota. Even unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 62 percent of South Dakotans. 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 South Dakotans and their families, public health and the economy.

Impossible choices between work and family are hurting South Dakota’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.

South Dakota’s economy and families are suffering

- In South Dakota, there is a 12 percentage-point gap in labor force participation between women and men.
- 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.4
- In South Dakota, a typical worker who takes four weeks of unpaid leave loses more than nearly $3,100 in income.5
- 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

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

- About 11,200 children are born in South Dakota each year, and in 79 percent of all South Dakota households with children — more than 160,000 homes — all parents report to work.7
- Women’s wages support their households. In South Dakota, 54 percent of white mothers are key family breadwinners. State-level data is limited, but nationally 79 percent of Black mothers, 64 percent of Native American mothers, 49 percent of Latina mothers and 43 percent of AAPI mothers are key breadwinners.8
Women make up nearly half South Dakota’s labor force (45 percent) and nearly one-quarter of its business owners (22 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

**South Dakota 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.

- More than one-quarter of South Dakota workers are 55 and older,11 and in the next 20 years, South Dakota’s population aged 65 and older will grow by 36,000.12
- 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,13 which may exacerbate or cause serious medical conditions that require care, particularly in older workers and workers with disabilities.14 In South Dakota, that would mean 27,500 older workers.15
- About 25 percent of South Dakota nursing homes have a shortage of direct care workers.16 Paid leave reduces nursing home utilization and can help recruitment and retention of care workers.17
- An estimated 108,000 South Dakotans report having long-term COVID-19 symptoms that affect their daily activities.18 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.19
- 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.20

**South Dakotans 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.


11 See note 3.


15 See note 3.


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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