Paid Leave Means A Stronger Washington

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Washington state is home to the fifth state paid family and medical leave program in the United States. Washington’s plan, which took effect in 2020, was passed with bipartisan support, builds on lessons learned from older state programs and is among the most progressive in the country.¹

Washingtonians have work and family responsibilities. Paid leave means no longer having to choose between job and family.

- About 83,200 children are born in Washington each year, and in 67 percent of all Washington households with children – more than 1 million homes – all parents have paying jobs.²
- Women’s wages support their households. In Washington, 64 percent of Black mothers, 50 percent of Latina mothers, 44 percent of white mothers and 42 percent of AAPI mothers are key family breadwinners. State-level data is limited, but nationally 64 percent of Native American mothers are breadwinners.³
- Women make up nearly half of Washington’s labor force (46 percent) and more than one-quarter of its business owners (29 percent).⁴
- Across the country, many men want to play a larger role in caring for their children, but unsupportive policies and stigma hold them back.⁵

Washington 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.

- In Washington more than one-fifth of workers are 55 and older,⁶ and in the next 20 years, the state’s population age 65 and older will grow by more than 425,000.⁷
- Nationwide, nearly one-third of all adults – and 41 percent of older Black women and 43 percent of older Latinas – hold a physically demanding job,⁸ which may exacerbate or cause serious medical conditions that require care, particularly in older workers and workers with disabilities.⁹ In Washington, that would mean 196,600 older workers, 3,600 older Black women workers and 7,500 older Latina workers.¹⁰
Paid leave reduces nursing home utilization and can help recruitment and retention of care workers.\textsuperscript{11}

About 723,000 Washingtonians report having long-term COVID-19 symptoms that affect their daily activities.\textsuperscript{12} 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.\textsuperscript{13}

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.\textsuperscript{14}

State paid leave plans like Washington’s show workers, families and businesses benefit from paid leave. Paid leave means people — especially women — aren’t forced to leave the labor force to care for their families or health, reducing turnover for employers of all sizes and boosting the economy.

Washington’s paid leave program strengthens the state

- Paid leave helps improve health outcomes and helps working people remain economically secure and stay connected to their jobs.\textsuperscript{15}
- Businesses’ employee retention can also improve significantly with paid leave, helping to strengthen bottom lines.\textsuperscript{16}
- State programs are used as intended by workers without overburdening employers.\textsuperscript{17}

Washington’s paid leave plan shows that paid leave programs work — a common sense, tested approach that works for families, businesses and economies. But people’s access to paid leave shouldn’t depend on where they live or work or what job they hold. The United States needs a common sense, national paid leave program 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.


3 Shaw, E., Mason, C. N., Lacarte, V., & Jauregui, E. (2020, May). Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID-19. Retrieved 12 January 2024, from Institute for Women’s Policy Research website: http://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf; “Key breadwinner” means a single mother who heads a household or a married mother who contributes 40 percent or more of the couple’s joint earnings. Nationally, 79 percent of Black mothers are key breadwinners; 64 percent of Native American mothers are key breadwinners; 60 percent of mothers identifying as multiracial or “other” race are key breadwinners; 49 percent of Latina mothers are key breadwinners; 48 percent of white mothers are key breadwinners; and 43 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers are key breadwinners.


9 Ibid.

10 See note 4. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; National Partnership analysis of 2018-2022 American Community Survey accessed via IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org. Number of Black, non-Hispanic women and Hispanic/Latina women in the state’s labor force who are aged 55 to 64. We use a five-year dataset to have a sufficient sample size to analyze state-level data; due to pandemic-related labor force impacts in 2020 and 2021, this is a conservative estimate and we expect the population of older women workers to be higher in future years.


16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

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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