

February 6, 2026

Commonwealth of Virginia Senate Finance  
and Appropriations Committee and  
House Appropriations Committee  
1000 Bank Street  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Members of the Virginia Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee and House  
Appropriations Committee,

On behalf of the National Partnership for Women & Families, A Better Balance, and the  
undersigned organizations, we urge the Virginia legislature to pass paid leave legislation  
that includes a realistic and inclusive definition of “family” to ensure Virginian workers  
can take paid leave to provide care to their chosen and extended families.

The overwhelming majority of households today depart from the outdated “nuclear family”  
model of a married husband, wife, and their biological children. For example, in 2022,  
more than 20 million Americans lived with an unmarried significant other,<sup>1</sup> and  
multigenerational households are growing in popularity.<sup>2</sup> Families come in all shapes and  
sizes, so it is important to recognize that many workers provide care to extended relatives,  
such as grandparents and grandchildren, parents-in-law, adult children, siblings, and  
“chosen family” – loved ones with a close, family-like relationship who lack a biological or  
legal relationship.

**There is strong precedent for inclusive definitions of “family” in state paid  
family and medical leave laws.** Nearly every state paid family and medical leave law  
has a family definition that is broader than the federal Family and Medical Leave Act’s  
restrictive definition, and seven state paid family and medical leave laws have inclusive  
definitions of “family” – as proposed in Virginia – that cover close loved ones who are not  
biologically or legally related to the worker.<sup>3</sup>

**The seven state paid family and medical leave programs that use an inclusive  
family definition have successfully implemented this coverage.** In those states,  
only a small minority of claims are from workers who need to care for extended or chosen  
family – reflecting the fact that an inclusive family definition creates an important right  
for workers with non-nuclear family structures without leading to significant increases in  
usage. In 2024, for example, only 0.3 percent of all paid family and medical leave claims in  
Colorado were to care for chosen or extended family (*other than* children, parents, spouses,  
domestic partners, siblings, grandparents, and grandchildren).<sup>4</sup> In Washington State,  
there were only 686 approved claims between July 2021 and March 2023 to care for  
chosen and extended family, and most of these claims were to care for an unmarried  
significant other.<sup>5</sup> Washington State’s Employment Security Department reported that  
the inclusive family definition had a “minimal impact on the account balance ratio” and  
“no impact on the rates themselves.”<sup>6</sup> The Department further reported the following:

The expanded family member definition increased equitable access to benefits for Washington workers seeking to care for their loved ones. Because of the new definition, those in caring kinship and close family-like relationships, who were excluded in the original law, became eligible to take leave to care for loved ones with a serious health condition. While the expansion, in terms of volumes, is relatively minor, the impact to these newly eligible individuals, now able to take leave to care for their loved ones, is substantial.<sup>7</sup>

More than 437,000 households in Virginia, or 12.7 percent of all households in the state, consist of an individual living alone.<sup>8</sup> In an emergency or during an illness, many of these individuals rely on care from chosen family or extended family. Furthermore, approximately 219,000 Virginia residents live with an unmarried partner, and more than 273,000 Virginians live with other nonrelatives – such as close friends. When an individual is seriously ill or has a medical emergency, they often rely on individuals they live with – even absent a blood or legal relationship – for help and caregiving.

When inclusive family definitions are used in paid family and medical leave programs, caregivers of all backgrounds can better balance their work, life, and caregiving responsibilities.<sup>9</sup> Paid leave that allows workers to take leave for their extended or chosen family is critical for all Virginians, but it will also have disproportionate benefits for LGBTQIA+ individuals, people with disabilities, and older adults in Virginia.

**An inclusive family definition is critical for disabled individuals, who are both caregivers and recipients of care.** A 2020 Center for American Progress analysis showed that 29 percent of all workers who took their most recent leave for caregiving in the past 12 months were providing care for a person with an ongoing health condition, such as a disability.<sup>10</sup> According to a 2017 report, among people with disabilities, 42 percent reported taking time off to care for chosen family, compared with 30 percent of people without disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

**Recognizing chosen family is vital for Virginian workers, especially LGBTQIA+ individuals.** Recognition of chosen family is of particular importance to LGBTQIA+ individuals, who often do not have accessible relationships with biological relatives for several reasons, such as moving to a more LGBTQIA+-friendly area away from biological family, LGBTQIA+ stigma within biological families, and family planning choices. In 2023, among LGBTQIA+ individuals, 58 percent reported being relied upon to care for a close friend or chosen family member.<sup>12</sup> An estimated 4 percent of Virginia's workforce (197,000 workers) are LGBTQIA+ individuals.<sup>13</sup>

**An inclusive family definition will be critical for caring for aging Virginians.** Among Americans who provide care to an adult age 65 or older, more than 39 percent care for a friend, neighbor, or other unrelated person.<sup>14</sup> As Virginia's aging population is expected to increase significantly,<sup>15</sup> more workers will need time away from work to provide care for their friends and neighbors.

**In addition to the strong precedent for inclusive definitions of “family” in state paid family and medical leave laws, our country’s largest employer – the federal government – has been using a similarly inclusive family definition for more than 50 years.**<sup>16</sup> The federal workforce definition includes chosen family, covering individuals whose close association with the federal employee is the equivalent of a family relationship (even absent a blood relationship). Since 1969, the federal government has repeatedly expanded the use of this inclusive family definition to include funeral leave, voluntary leave transfers, and sick leave.<sup>17</sup> Federal workers are entitled to use up to 12 weeks of sick leave a year to care for a family member—including chosen family—with a serious health condition.<sup>18</sup>

Virginian workers should be able to take time away from work to care for their families — no matter their family composition — without sacrificing their economic security. We urge you to maintain an inclusive definition of “family” that allows workers to take leave for their extended or chosen family.

Sincerely,

A Better Balance  
The National Partnership for Women & Families  
AAUW Virginia  
American Association of People with Disabilities  
Caring Across Generations  
Center for Law and Social Policy  
COLAGE  
Diverse Elders Coalition  
Endeppendence Center of Northern Virginia, Inc. (ECNV)  
Equal Rights Advocates  
Equality Virginia  
Family Values @ Work  
Family Values @ Work Action  
Freedom Virginia  
Main Street Alliance  
MomsRising  
Movement Advancement Project  
National Adult Day Services Association  
National Alliance for Caregiving  
National Domestic Workers Alliance  
National Women's Law Center Action Fund  
NBJC  
Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)  
Reproductive Freedom for All  
SAGE  
The Arc of Northern Virginia  
The Arc of Virginia Inc.  
YWCA USA

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<sup>1</sup> Julian, C. A. (2023). A decade of change in shares of single, cohabiting, and married individuals, 2012-2022. Family Profiles, FP-23-07. National Center for Family & Marriage Research, <https://doi.org/10.25035/ncfmr/fp-23-07>.

<sup>2</sup> A Better Balance, Paid Family and Medical Leave Supports the Health, Well-Being, and Financial Security of Older Adults and their Caregivers (January 2026), <https://www.abetterbalance.org/resources/paid-family-and-medical-leave-supports-the-health-well-being-and-financial-security-of-older-adults-and-their-caregivers/>.

<sup>3</sup> A Better Balance, Fact Sheet: The Importance of Inclusive, Realistic Family Definitions for Paid Leave (December 2025), <https://www.abetterbalance.org/resources/fact-sheet-importance-of-broad-family-definitions-for-paid-leave/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> ESSB 5097 Family Member Expansion Analysis: 2nd Report, Washington State Employment Security Department, (June 2023), <https://esd.wa.gov/media/pdf/67/essb-5097-family-member-expansion-analysis-230629pdf/download?inline>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> Selected Social Characteristics in the United States: Virginia, U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, Table DP02,

<https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP1Y2024.DP02?q=Virginia+DP02&g=040XX00US51>.

<sup>9</sup> A Better Balance, Paid Family and Medical Leave Supports the Health, Well-Being, and Financial Security of Older Adults and their Caregivers (January 2026), <https://www.abetterbalance.org/resources/paid-family-and-medical-leave-supports-the-health-well-being-and-financial-security-of-older-adults-and-their-caregivers/>.

<sup>10</sup> Diana Boesch and Rebecca Cokley, Center for American Progress, The Disability Community Needs Paid Family and Medical Leave (October 2020), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/disability-community-needs-paid-family-medical-leave/>.

<sup>11</sup> Katherine Gallagher Robbins et al., Center for American Progress, People Need Paid Leave Policies That Cover Chosen Family (October 2017), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/people-need-paid-leave-policies-that-cover-chosen-family/>

<sup>12</sup> Caroline Medina and Molly Weston Williamson, Paid Leave Policies Must Include Chosen Family (March 2023), <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/paid-leave-policies-must-include-chosen-family/>.

<sup>13</sup> Virginia's Equality Profile, Movement Advancement Project (last visited February 2026), [https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/profile\\_state/VA](https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/profile_state/VA).

<sup>14</sup> Unpaid Eldercare in the United States (2023-2024): Data from the American Time Use Survey, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (Sept. 25, 2025), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/elcare.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Amended Virginia State Plan for Aging Services October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2027, Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (October 2025), <https://rga.lis.virginia.gov/Published/2025/RD603/PDF>.

<sup>16</sup> The relevant language covers “any individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a family relationship.” See *Absence and Leave: Funeral Leave*, 34 Fed. Reg. 13,655 (Aug. 26, 1969) (codified at 5 C.F.R. pt. 630); *Absence and Leave; Voluntary Leave Transfer Program*, 54 Fed. Reg. 4749 (Jan. 31, 1989) (codified at 5 C.F.R. pt. 630); *Absence and Leave; Sick Leave*, 59 Fed. Reg. 62,266 (Dec. 2, 1994) (codified at 5 C.F.R. pt. 630); *Granting Sick Leave* (codified at 16 5 C.F.R § 630.401(c)).

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*