



## Paid Family and Medical Leave

Every Ohio child - no matter what they look like, where they live or who their parents are - deserves the opportunity to thrive. By investing in family-friendly and children-centered policy solutions like paid family and medical leave, we can ensure that families are set up for success and children can reach their full potential.

When COVID-19 first disrupted our way of life, Congress came together and passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act providing emergency paid leave benefits for coronavirus-related child care reasons. However, the policy had significant limitations and expired in 2020. The U.S. remains the only industrialized nation in the world without some form of a permanent national paid leave policy. Because of that shortcoming, **only 25 percent of civilian workers have access to paid leave through their employers<sup>1</sup>**, and the workers who need access to the policy the most have been left behind: women, people of color, and low-wage workers<sup>2</sup>.

Access to paid family and medical leave promotes economic stability and workforce participation for parents and caregivers, **and the policy is integral to children's health, success, and futures.**

### Policy

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the immediate need for paid leave as families continue to slip through the cracks of the caregiving system and struggle under the strain of the crisis. There is mounting evidence of the far-reaching benefits that comprehensive and inclusive paid family and medical leave can have for children and families, as well as for businesses and our economy.

In the last four Ohio General Assemblies, state lawmakers proposed legislation to create a statewide paid family and medical leave program. Now, state leaders have an opportunity to enact a policy through the operating budget process. In order to address current racial, gender, and economic disparities in access to leave, the program should be modeled after evidence-based approaches to paid

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/NBU1870000000000033349>

<sup>2</sup> <https://paidleave.us/plusemployertrendsreport>

leave policies that center Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC), women, and workers with low-wages. The policy must:

- **Include comprehensive coverage for leave**, including caring for and bonding with a newborn, new-adopted child, or newly-placed foster child; recovery after stillbirth; caring for a family member with a serious health condition; and addressing an individual's own serious health condition.
- **Cover all employers, regardless of size or sector**, including part-time workers, hourly workers, and domestic workers, and extend coverage of benefits for self-employed workers and contract workers (1099 employees) to ensure that no working person or family is left behind.
- **Provide adequate wage replacement** for all leave circumstances to make it accessible, particularly for low-wage and part-time workers.
- **Adopt an inclusive definition** of an individual who is covered by caregiving leave to ensure that everyone in the community can be cared for if they need it.
- **Provide adequate leave time of at least 12-weeks** to be utilized for parental, caregiving, or personal medical leave.
- **Guarantee job-protection, anti-retaliation, and anti-discrimination** protections for workers on leave.

## Challenge

In Ohio, even *unpaid* leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is inaccessible for 61 percent of working people, either because they are ineligible or because they cannot afford to take unpaid leave<sup>3</sup>. This can lead to working people making the impossible choice between the family they love and the income they need as they welcome a new child or face serious personal or family health needs.

Without a state policy, access to paid leave is dependent upon where a person lives or works - and access is not equal. Nationally, 48 percent of Latino workers and 43 percent of Black workers do not have access to any paid or partially paid parental leave, compared to 42 percent of white workers, which contributes to racial disparities in health outcomes and economic opportunity<sup>4</sup>.

Because of disparities in access to economic support, families of color, particularly Black and Latino families, experience a vast wealth gap compared to white families, and the lack of access to paid leave exacerbates the racial wealth gap. Access to paid family leave is fundamentally important not only from an economic standpoint, but also from a health perspective.

**Paid leave has been shown to yield critical long-term health benefits for children and mothers:**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/paid-leave-means-a-stronger-ohio.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>

- Paid leave can help to address racial health disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes, and this is particularly important for Black babies who have the highest infant mortality rate of any racial or ethnic group in the U.S.<sup>5</sup>
- Rates of infant mortality, immunization, and breastfeeding have all been seen to improve when parents or caregivers have access to paid leave during pregnancy and after childbirth. As a result, the health benefits for babies include reduced rates of infections, allergies, sudden infant death syndrome, obesity, diabetes, childhood lymphoma, and leukemia<sup>6</sup>.
- Early bonding between caregivers and children has been associated with better mental health and self-esteem later in life, and it can help young children develop their ability to learn, to form positive relationships, and to exercise self-control<sup>7</sup>.

## Opportunity

Currently, thirteen U.S. states and the District of Columbia have established statewide paid family and medical leave laws, with the state of Delaware most recently implementing paid leave in 2022. In the state of Ohio, there are more than 10 city or county governments that have enacted paid leave policies for the municipal workforce, including Columbus, Middletown, and Summit County.

States have also utilized the state budget process to act on improving or enacting paid leave or paid sick policies. For example, Michigan recently allocated \$10 million in a state budget to enact new paid parental leave benefits for the nearly 49,000 employees that work for the State of Michigan. The policy took effect at the start of Fiscal Year 2021, and it allows eligible employees to take up to 12 weeks of paid leave following the birth or adoption of a new child. Now, Ohio has a chance to join as a national leader in this work by enacting paid leave through our next state operating budget.

## Support Child Well-Being: Budget Recommendation

The evidence is clear: paid family and medical leave strengthens families, reduces racial health and economic disparities, improves critical health outcomes for children, and promotes a strong economy. In the upcoming state budget, Ohio leaders should prioritize families and children by establishing a statewide paid family and medical leave program. **Providing paid family and medical leave in Ohio would take a pivotal step forward in fostering a state with healthy children and families, and it is an important tool to help Ohio’s economy rebuild from the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and impending recession.**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/05/02/469186/eliminating-racial-disparities-maternal-infant-mortality/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://innovationohio.org/front-page/io-analysis-the-benefits-of-paid-parental-leave/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/the-child-development-case-for-a-national-paid-family-and-medical-leave-insurance-program.pdf>