



**OHIO
CHILDREN'S
BUDGET**
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ISSUE BRIEF

ISSUE: Paid Family and Medical Leave

The United States is the only industrialized country in the world without some form of guaranteed, legally-protected paid leave. Because of that shortcoming, only 15 percent of workers have access to paid family leave, and that drops to a mere four percent among low-wage workers.

Without paid leave many worker families are forced to sacrifice their financial stability, or lose their jobs altogether, in order to take time away from work to welcome a new child or address a family medical emergency. Extending access to paid leave has been shown to strengthen women and families, reduce gender and economic disparities, have a positive impact on local economies, improve critical health outcomes for moms and babies, and contribute to a stronger, more productive workforce.

Policy

There has been mounting recognition across the country of the far-reaching need for paid family leave – and of the benefits of the policy for children and families, workers and businesses – as a growing number of municipalities and states have proposed and passed paid leave policies. In the last two General Assemblies, state lawmakers in Ohio have also proposed legislation to create a state-wide family and medical leave insurance program.

The governor and state legislature have the opportunity to enact a state family and medical leave insurance program through the budget process. This policy should model proposed state legislation, including:

- Purpose of leave: Workers would continue earning a percentage of their paycheck while they take time off work to:
 - care for and bond with a newborn, newly-adopted child, or newly-placed foster child,
 - care for a family member with a serious health condition,
 - address one's own medical condition,
- Duration of leave: Workers would be provided up to 12 weeks of family and medical leave during a 12-month period at partial pay.



- **Benefit amount:** Employees will receive wage replacement benefits based on their average weekly wages. The maximum benefit amount shall not exceed \$1,000 per week.
- **Program funding mechanism:** Funding for the program is provided entirely by the employee through premiums deducted from employees' wages and remitted to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). The premium amount will be determined following an actuarial evaluation conducted by the Director of ODJFS. The Ohio policy is based on legislation currently pending in Colorado, which has estimated that the total cost to an employee would be approximately \$25 to \$30 per year.
- **Participation in the program:** Participation in the program is not mandatory for individuals. Those wishing to opt-out of the program will be given that option and will not be required to pay premiums toward the program. Independent contractors will have the ability to join the program for an initial period of coverage lasting at least three years.

Challenges

No one should have to choose between caring for a loved one and earning a paycheck. Without access to family-friendly workplace policies like paid family and medical leave, many Ohio working families are forced to make this impossible choice.

In Ohio, even unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is inaccessible for 62 percent of working people. Black and Latina women are even less likely than white women to have access to paid leave, which exacerbates the wealth gaps and racial disparities between families of color and white families. In the absence of a national standard, it is crucial for states to enact paid leave policies that provide all workers with access to the kind of workplace supports they want, need, and deserve to meet the demands of work and needs of family.

Opportunities

When unpaid leave is the only option, it is most likely to be utilized by those who are relatively well-off and can afford the resulting loss of income – exacerbating disparities already experienced by low-income workers. Access to paid family leave is fundamentally important not only from an economic standpoint for families' financial stability, but also from a health perspective.

Paid leave has been shown to improve critical health outcomes for mothers and babies:

- Rates of infant mortality, immunization, and breastfeeding have all been seen to improve when women have access to paid leave during pregnancy and after childbirth.
 - A 10-week extension in paid leave is associated with a decrease in deaths in the first month of life by 2.6 percent and in the second through twelfth months of life by 4.1 percent.
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- Critical bonding time in the first months of life lead to improved child development. In fact, children of mothers who return to work less than three months following childbirth show a reduction in cognitive development.
- Children born to mothers who return to work less than 12 weeks following delivery have higher rates of behavioral problems later in life.
- The health benefits for babies as a result of increased rates of breastfeeding, particularly those born preterm, include reduced rates of infections, allergies, sudden infant death syndrome, obesity, diabetes, childhood lymphoma, and leukemia.

Paid family leave is a pro-family policy, creating more involved fathers and stronger families

- Paid family leave leads to more involved fathers. Research on U.S. fathers shows that fathers who take even a week or two of paternity leave are more involved than fathers who take no leave in the care of their children nine months later.
- When fathers take paid leave, it has been shown to have long-term impacts on the involvement and parenting. Surveys of fathers who take paid leave show that they are more comfortable as active, responsible parents as a result of leave-taking.
- Increased involvement of fathers has a direct impact on the life and future of the child. More involved fathers have been shown to promote children’s educational attainment and emotional stability.

Support Child Well-Being: Recommendations

Ohio should put families first, and that means enacting a state Family Medical Leave Insurance (FMLI) fund to provide workers with the support they need to balance the demands of work and home. By establishing a state FMLI program, Ohio working families will have access to the financial support they need to take time off work to care for and bond with a new child, care for a family member with a medical emergency, or address their own health issue, without risking their economic security. Providing paid family leave in Ohio would take a pivotal step forward in fostering a state with healthy children and families, a strong workforce, and a thriving economy.

For more information on Family Paid Leave, please refer to the following publications:

Fact Sheet: What Would a Statewide Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program Mean for Ohio (available online here: http://womenspublicpolicynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/WPPN_FACTSHEET_PFL_FINAL.pdf)

Fact Sheet: The Bi-Partisan Case for Paid Family and Medical Leave (available online here: http://womenspublicpolicynetwork.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/09/WPPN_FACTSHEET_PFLBiPartisanCase_FINAL.pdf)

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