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May 22, 2019

Re: Support the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act (H.R. 1185)

Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of the National Women's Law Center, **we strongly urge you to support the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act (H.R. 1185)**. For over 45 years, the National Women's Law Center has advocated to expand opportunities for women and girls, driving towards a world where all can live and work with equality and dignity. The FAMILY Act would help make this vision a reality. The FAMILY Act is a national paid family and medical leave plan that would ensure that workers can take the time they need to address serious health and caregiving needs for themselves and their families. It would help support working families' economic security and promote gender equity in the workplace. The FAMILY Act enjoys broad bipartisan support from voters and is the only national paid family and medical leave plan that reflects what people, especially women and families, in the United States need.

Despite the critical need for access to paid family and medical leave, the vast majority of people in the United States do not have this basic protection. Over 100 million people, or 83 percent of workers, lack access to paid family leave through their employer, and over 60 percent lack access to paid personal medical leave. For people working in low-wage and part-time jobs—most of whom are women—access is even more limited: among workers in the lowest 25 percent of wage earners, only 8 percent have access to paid family leave. What's more, almost two-thirds of workers also lack access to unpaid leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) either due to eligibility restrictions or because they cannot afford to take unpaid leave. This reality leaves people with the impossible choice between taking care of their families and maintaining their financial security.

With the FAMILY Act, workers would earn two-thirds of their wages, up to a cap, for a limited period of time (up to 60 workdays, or 12 workweeks in a year) to address their own serious health issue, including pregnancy or childbirth; to deal with the serious health issue of a family member; to care for a new child; and for certain military caregiving and leave purposes. Employees, employers and self-employed workers would fund the benefits and the administrative costs of the program by contributing a small amount in each pay period to a self-sustaining fund, administered through a new Office of Paid Family and Medical Leave. Eligibility rules would allow younger, part-time, low-wage and contingent workers to contribute and benefit, regardless of their employer's size or their length of time on the job.

Many states, such as California, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island, have already successfully implemented paid family and medical leave plans of their own, and the FAMILY Act builds on these successes by ensuring that *all* workers, no matter what state they are in, have access to this vital resource. The FAMILY Act would also strengthen businesses large and small by reducing turnover costs and increasing employee loyalty. And the FAMILY Act includes self-employed workers, helping to balance the risks often associated with starting a new business.

The FAMILY Act would address the range of care needs that people—particularly women—face today. Women are more likely than men to serve as primary caregivers and are therefore more likely to need paid time off to ensure that their children or other family members receive the medical care and attention that they need. Further, the birth of a child brings its own set of unique challenges that women disproportionately face. The FAMILY Act would support women and their families by ensuring that they have the access to the paid family and medical leave necessary to fulfill this caregiving role in a wide range of circumstances.

In addition to providing much needed support for caregiving, the FAMILY Act would support improved health outcomes and could help lower health care costs. When new mothers have access to paid leave, they are more likely to take the doctor-recommended amount of time away from work and their children are more likely to receive necessary medical check-ups and critical immunizations. And when a child is seriously ill, the presence of a parent shortens that child's hospital stay by 31 percent.

We are overdue to catch up with the rest of the industrialized world and adopt a nationwide paid family and medical leave standard, and it is important to get the policy details right. Disparities in access to paid leave, changing demographics, and the realities working families face today require that any national plan be: 1) comprehensive of working people's needs as reflected in the FMLA, 2) inclusive of all working people across the United States, and 3) provide a meaningful duration of leave and wage replacement rate to make taking leave financially possible for all working people. A national paid family and medical leave plan must be affordable, cost-effective, and sustainably funded with new revenue—not funded by cutting or reducing benefits from programs on which people rely. Any plan that fails to meet these tests is unacceptable. **The FAMILY Act is the only national paid family and medical leave proposal that meets all of these criteria and reflects what most people in the United States need.**

Women and families deserve a national paid family and medical leave plan that will grant them the time they need to care for themselves and their families and help them—and their communities—thrive. **We strongly urge you to support the FAMILY Act (H.R. 1185)** and reject inadequate proposals that would fail to meet the needs of the nation's workforce, families, or businesses.

Sincerely,



Melissa Boteach
Vice President for Income Security and Child Care/Early Learning