

# GUARANTEE PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE FOR ALL WORKERS

## THE PROBLEM

Care is an issue that impacts everyone—at some point, we will all need to provide care for a loved one or receive care ourselves. Yet the United States remains [one of the only wealthy countries](#) in the world with no national paid leave policy, and only [14 states](#) and the District of Columbia have laws guaranteeing paid leave. As a result, people across the country—especially women—are struggling to care for themselves and their loved ones while paying their bills and supporting their families.

Nearly [three-quarters of workers](#) in the United States lack access to paid family leave through their employers (i.e., paid time away from work to, for example, care for a family member with a serious health condition or a new baby); and [nearly six in 10 \(57%\) don't receive](#) paid medical leave to address their own serious health conditions through an employer-provided short-term disability program. For people working in low-paid and [part-time jobs—most of whom are women](#)—access is even more limited; among workers in the lowest quartile of wage earners, for example, [only 14% have access](#) to paid family leave. The lack of paid leave falls particularly hard on Black women, [38% of whom](#) reported not taking leave, even when it was needed. Many workers don't take leave because of the [economic hardship](#) that could come from unpaid or partially paid time away from work. Workers who do take unpaid leave, or drop out of the workforce altogether, face [compounding economic harms](#) due to lower wages, stagnated career advancement, or an [inability to save for retirement](#).

## THE SOLUTION

- Guarantee at least 12 weeks of paid leave for all workers. Currently, no state paid leave policy provides [less than 12 weeks](#). A robust body of research shows that less than 12 weeks of parental leave is insufficient for maternal or child health and well-being, and there are meaningful [improvements to health outcomes](#) with a longer duration of leave.
- Reimburse all or most of employee's wages using a progressive scale, so the lowest paid workers receive the largest percentage of their wages.

- Protect all workers, including part-time workers and independent contractors, regardless of industry or employer size. A paid leave law that does not provide benefits for part-time workers would disproportionately harm women, who are [overrepresented in part-time jobs](#) while also acting as caregivers for their families.
- Guarantee that all workers are protected from retaliation for taking leave, can maintain health insurance coverage during leave, and have the right to return to their jobs following leave.
- Ensure workers can take leave to care for themselves and a broad range of family members, including spouses, domestic partners, parents, children of any age, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, and other individuals who comprise someone's "chosen family." LGBTQI+ individuals are [more likely](#) than non-LGBTQI+ people to rely on chosen family members to provide support for health-related concerns. And people of color and immigrants are [more likely to live in multigenerational households](#)—generally two or more adult generations or a "skipped generation" and grandchildren younger than 25. This arrangement has become [increasingly common](#) among older adults where they may need to provide care to a wider range of family members.
- Allow workers to use the benefit for a full range of caregiving needs, including time for their own serious health conditions, parental leave, leave to care for a loved one's serious health condition, deployment-related leave, and [safe leave](#) for survivors of domestic violence.
- Click [here](#) for a model state paid family and medical leave policy, and [here](#) for guidance on paid safe leave policies.
- Click [here](#) for details on existing paid and unpaid leave policies in the United States.
- Click [here](#) for additional information on how to implement new statewide paid leave programs.

## TALKING POINTS ON THE SOLUTION

- Providing workers with paid leave helps families make ends meet and afford what they need to thrive. In the short term, workers have financial support, and a job to go back to, while they manage care needs. Paid leave also helps ensure long-term economic security, especially for women. Retirement programs like Social Security and employer-sponsored pensions disadvantage people who take time out of the workforce, including for caregiving responsibilities. In 2024, women received over \$400 less a month, or a little over [\\$4,880 less a year in Social Security benefits than men](#), driven in part by women spending fewer years in the workforce.
- Paid leave promotes gender equity. Women working full time, year-round are typically paid only 81 cents for every dollar paid to men; that translates to nearly [\\$542,000 lost over a 40-year career](#). That lifetime loss doesn't account for the women who are pushed

out of the labor force each year when their caregiving responsibilities come into conflict with their jobs. Providing national paid family and medical leave can help narrow these disparities by increasing women's ability to stay [attached to the workforce](#).

- Guaranteeing paid parental leave [normalizes](#) men as caregivers and increases fathers' involvement in [child care among lower income families](#). When fathers take paid leave after the birth of a new child, [they report](#) improved interactions with their children, lower stress levels for both parents, and improved health outcomes for parents and children.
- Paid leave helps combat racial inequality. Nearly seven in 10 Black mothers are primary [breadwinners](#) in their families, but [Black and Latinx\\* workers have less access to paid family and medical leave compared to white workers](#). And when faced with an unforeseen illness or caregiving need, the [racial and gender wealth gaps](#) in this country mean that women of color are less likely to have the economic resources to allow them to take time away from work. Providing all workers with paid time to care would help close these gaps, while also improving persistent racial [health disparities](#) during pregnancy.
- Paid family and medical leave contributes to a robust economy. Research shows that paid leave [strengthens businesses](#) of all sizes by [reducing turnover costs and increasing employee retention](#). (Click [here](#) for additional resources and information for businesses advocating for paid leave policies).
- When new mothers have access to paid leave, they experience improvements in their own physical and mental health, including a decrease in [postpartum depression](#).
- Paid safe leave helps [survivors of violence keep their jobs and economic security](#) while navigating complicated needs, including preparing for or participating in legal proceedings, seeking supportive services, enrolling children in a new school or child care, moving, or addressing their own physical or mental health.

### **Additional Messaging Resources**

- Click [here](#) for a set of talking points for every state, with state-specific data, on how paid family and medical leave would help working people and their families.
- Click [here](#) for an example of talking points on paid family and medical leave from the perspective of a small business owner.

## Public Popularity

- Paid family and medical leave is incredibly popular. In a November 2024 survey, [nearly three in four voters](#) (74%) reported supporting establishing a national paid family and medical leave program that guarantees 12 weeks of job protected paid leave.
  - » May 2025 polling of Pennsylvania voters showed [strong bipartisan support](#) for paid family leave. And another [July 2025 survey of Pennsylvania voters](#) found that when people hear about proposed paid family and medical leave legislation, they are more likely to agree that the state government is looking out for working people.
- A [May 2026 survey](#) found that Americans are deeply concerned about the cost of living, and 73% of adults say providing all workers with access to paid family and medical leave would help them and their families, including 86% of mothers with children under 18.

## Examples of State and Local Policies

- Currently, [14 states](#)—including Colorado, Maryland, Virginia, and Minnesota—and the District of Columbia have laws guaranteeing paid leave for workers.
- In states that have passed paid leave laws, [research shows](#) that public health has improved, including increased on-time vaccination rates for children, reductions in infant hospitalizations, and improvements in maternal physical and mental health after childbirth.
- Employers also report seeing benefits from paid leave. In a [study of the New Jersey](#) paid leave law, for example, most employers reported no negative impact on profitability while also seeing a meaningful increase in employee morale and a decrease in stress.

*\*The data uses the term Hispanic, but this Playbook uses the terms Latina/Latinas/Latinx.*