

Fathers Need Paid Family and Medical Leave

JUNE 2019

More men and fathers want to and do provide more care for their families now than in the past,¹ and the vast majority of the public says it's equally important for mothers and fathers to bond with babies.² Although some employers recognize the importance of providing leave for women and men, most still do not. As a result, men must often forgo parental leave or take shorter periods of family leave to avoid losing income and facing workplace stigma.³

All parents – fathers and mothers – should be able to take time away from their jobs to care for their families without facing financial hardship or workplace discrimination. A national paid family and medical leave insurance program would provide all working people critical income when they need time off for family or medical reasons.

Most Men Lack Access to Paid Family Leave

Since 1965, fathers in the United States have nearly tripled the time they spend caring for children, and working fathers are now just as likely as working mothers to say they find it difficult to manage work and family responsibilities.⁴ Despite these changes, most men do not have access to leave that would allow them to take time away from work after the birth or adoption of a child.

- Only 20 percent of private sector workers are employed at worksites that offer paid paternity leave to *most* or all male employees, and only 9 percent of private sector workers are employed at worksites that offer paid paternity leave to *all* male employees.⁵
- One study found that only one in 20 fathers in professional jobs took more than two weeks off after their most recent child was born – and a staggering three out of four took one week or less.⁶ Low-income fathers face even higher barriers: one study found that nearly 60 percent of low-income fathers reported taking zero weeks of paid time away from work after the birth or adoption of a child.⁷
- Being a good financial provider continues to be seen as an important part of being a good father,⁸ and outdated, gendered norms in too many workplaces still assume that being a caregiver is incompatible with success at a job.⁹ As a result, men, especially those without paid leave, often feel pressure to limit their time off of work in order to keep a steady income.¹⁰

Many Fathers Face Stigma for Taking Leave

Men need greater access to paid family leave. The United States also needs a cultural shift in attitudes about men as caregivers so they can be confident that they can use the leave that is available to them without negative repercussions.¹¹ Many fathers want to be more involved with their families, play a larger caregiving role, and support their partners' careers.¹² But taking time away from work for family caregiving can bring harassment, discrimination or mistreatment¹³ that result in fathers being less likely to take the leave that is available to them. It is also a disincentive to take leave if doing so negatively affects their careers and their families' economic opportunities due to lower pay or being passed over for promotions.¹⁴

Creating More Supportive Workplaces Would Help Fathers, Their Families, Businesses and Taxpayers

A growing body of evidence makes clear that paid family leave has a positive impact on children and parents, families' economic security, employers and taxpayers.

- **Parental access to paid leave promotes children's development and family well-being.** In two-parent, opposite-sex households, fathers who take two or more weeks off after the birth of a child are more involved in that child's direct care nine months after birth than fathers who take no leave.¹⁵ Involved fathers promote children's educational attainment and emotional stability and reduce maternal stress.¹⁶ A father's involvement in a newborn's care in the first six months can also mean both mother and baby sleep better.¹⁷ When men attend prenatal medical appointments and remain involved throughout the pregnancy, women have safer births and decreased risk of postpartum depression.¹⁸
- **Households are more equal when fathers have paid leave.** When new dads in households with a mother and father take paid leave, their families experience a more equitable division of parental responsibilities, including household chores and direct caregiving.¹⁹ Fathers who take paid family leave also say they are more comfortable as active, responsible co-parents.²⁰
- **Paid leave for men supports working mothers.** In more than 48 million U.S. households with children (70 percent), all parents are employed,²¹ and women are key breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of families with children.²² Yet women are still more likely than men to stop working or to work part time after the birth of a child.²³ Paid paternity leave may increase women's labor force participation by promoting men's involvement at home and making it easier for women to return to the workforce.²⁴ Access to paid leave also affects women's wages and, thus, their families' economic security. Research from Sweden shows that each additional month of parental leave taken by a child's father increases the mother's wages by

nearly 7 percent,²⁵ which affects women's income and retirement security over their lifetimes.

- **Fathers with paid leave are less likely to use public assistance.** Having a baby is the most expensive health event many families face during reproductive years.²⁶ But new fathers who take paid leave are significantly less likely than fathers who do not to report receiving public assistance or food stamps (now known as SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) in the year following their child's birth (controlling for other relevant factors).²⁷ On average, men who take paid leave report receiving \$420 less in public assistance in the year following their child's birth than men who do not take leave.²⁸

Fathers Should Have Access to Paid Family Leave No Matter Where They Live or Work

Public policies help change culture and practice. State paid family leave programs are currently in place in five states: California, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York and, as of 2019, Washington state. All five programs provide paid leave to both women and men who need to care for new children or seriously ill family members. In California, fathers now account for more than 40 percent of new parents seeking to take paid family leave to care for a new child, up from 17 percent when the law took effect more than a decade ago.²⁹ In Rhode Island, which implemented paid family leave in 2014, more than 40 percent of family caregiving claims in 2018 were filed by men.³⁰ Beginning in 2019 and 2020, Massachusetts and the District of Columbia, respectively, will also guarantee paid family and medical leave through state paid leave insurance programs.³¹ The Connecticut state legislature also passed a paid family and medical leave bill, which will go into effect in 2021.³²

The Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act (H.R. 1185/S. 463) would create a national paid family and medical leave insurance program that would enable workers to receive up to 66 percent of their wages for up to 12 weeks to address their own serious health condition; to deal with the serious health condition of a parent, spouse, domestic partner or child; to care for a new child; or for certain military caregiving purposes. The FAMILY Act would establish a reasonable standard that would bring the nation's public policies more in line with the needs of the workforce. It would benefit women and men, workers, their families, businesses and our economy.

Learn more at NationalPartnership.org/theFAMILYAct.

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The National Partnership for Women & Families is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, reproductive health and rights, access to quality, affordable health care and policies that help all people meet the dual demands of work and family. More information is available at NationalPartnership.org.

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