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MEMO

New Survey Shows Voters Support a National Paid Family and Medical Leave Policy that Covers Everyone – Here’s Why and How to Talk About It

Key Finding: Most voters reject a proposal to pay for a national paid leave policy through early draws from Social Security; want comprehensive paid family and medical leave instead of limited parents-only paid leave.

In a new survey by research firms PerryUndem (non-partisan) and Bellwether Research & Consulting (Republican), voters find consensus in their support for a national paid family and medical leave policy.¹ While other polls have consistently found support for national paid leave, this new study shows voters want a *comprehensive* policy that will not only cover new parents but also those dealing with serious illness, caring for a family member dealing with serious illness, or who are affected by the military deployment or serious injury of a family member. Many voters also prefer that employers and employees share the costs of this program and pay for this national policy through a small payroll tax. They overwhelmingly reject a policy that would allow individuals to draw early from Social Security.

Key survey findings are below, followed by recommendations on messaging:

- **There is strong support for a comprehensive national paid and family leave plan.** Eight in ten voters (84%) support a comprehensive, inclusive, sustainably funded plan that includes all working people for all serious family and medical needs established in the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) (to care for a new child, their own illness, an ill family member or to deal with the impacts of a military deployment). Among all demographic groups – including across party lines – there is large majority support for comprehensive paid leave.

¹ The survey of 1,004 registered voters was sponsored by the National Partnership for Women & Families. The survey was conducted July 9-23, 2018 using NORC's AmeriSpeak nationally representative panel at the University of Chicago. The margin of sampling error on the total results: +/- 4.3 percentage points.

- **The most popular proposal among the four tested is modeled on the FAMILY Act.²** Eight in 10 voters (80%) support this proposal (Democrats 89%; Independents 74%; Republicans 76%) and when asked to rank the four policy ideas from best to worst, this plan was the top choice across party ID. This plan would extend paid leave to all working people who need to care for a new child, an ill family member, their own illness, or for military family care. Employees and employers would share the cost through a payroll tax that would go into a national fund. Working people would receive 66 percent of their usual pay, up to a \$4000 monthly cap, for up to 12 weeks.
- **The FAMILY Act’s shared cost is voters’ preferred approach to paying for paid leave.** The vast majority of voters are willing to identify a new revenue stream to pay for a national paid leave policy. Voters prefer that employees and employers share the costs of paid leave (38%) to any other type of funding approach by quite a large margin – and, as detailed below, the vast majority of voters are willing to contribute via payroll taxes to a national paid leave fund in amounts that exceed the FAMILY Act program’s actual cost. The next most popular funding mechanism is having employers alone pay for a national paid leave program (21%) or having it come from the federal budget, even if that means a tax increase (19%). The shared-cost preference holds across party lines and income levels: the joint employee-employer funding model is the top choice for Democrats (34%), Independents (37%), and Republicans (43%).
- **Voters are on board to help share the costs of a paid leave fund.** The survey suggests most voters are willing to contribute to a paid leave fund in amounts higher than a national comprehensive paid leave plan, like the FAMILY Act, would actually cost. Seven in 10 are willing to contribute 1% of their wages, or 1 cent for every dollar earned; lower income voters are even more likely to be willing to contribute this amount than higher income voters. Large majorities of Democrats (83%), Independents (67%), and Republicans (64%) are willing to contribute at least 1% of their wages.
- **A majority oppose a paid leave proposal similar to the one introduced recently by Senator Rubio and supported by Representative Wagner.** The survey tested four proposals for a national paid leave policy. One similar to the recent Rubio proposal, which would allow new parents to use Social Security to fund only paid parental leave by delaying retirement and taking a lifetime benefit cut, was the least popular among voters. Fewer than 1 in 10 voters said this was their preferred choice for a paid leave policy.
- **There is almost no support for funding a national paid family and medical leave plan through early draws from Social Security.** Voters nearly unanimously oppose this idea (only 3% prefer this model). This low support is consistent across party ID (Democrats 1%; Independents 5%; Republicans 2% prefer this funding model).

² The FAMILY Act, a national paid leave proposal sponsored by Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D – Conn.) and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D – N.Y.), was called the “Personal and Family Security Fund” in the survey.

- **Voters overwhelmingly recognize that only a small percentage of workers are offered paid family and medical leave right now.** Nearly 3 in 4 voters think only a small segment of workers are offered leave, while only 8% believe most people who work are offered paid family and medical leave. In reality, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 15% of workers are offered paid family leave at their jobs, and just under 40% are offered temporary disability insurance for their own serious health issues that require time away from work; in the survey, voters found these data points among the most persuasive facts related to the need for a national paid leave program. And, most voters say they would feel angry, sad, frustrated or stressed if *they* were kept from caring for a loved one.
- **To fill this gap, most voters believe any plan should cover all working people, regardless of employment situation, job or wage level.** Large majorities (80%) across party lines think it is important any approach to paid leave also cover self-employed, freelance, and contract workers – a growing segment of the electorate. Large majorities (82%) also think it is important for a national paid leave plan to be available and affordable for both higher wage, management-level people and to middle-level and lower-wage front-line workers.
- **Many feel a personal stake in this issue, especially when it comes to elder care and personal medical leave.** More than 1 in 2 voters (53%) – and 72% of those ages 18 to 44 – think a national paid family and medical leave policy could help them, now or in the future, and another one-fifth (19%) wouldn't rule it out. Of those who think they might need paid leave at some point, two-thirds (65%) said they might use it to care for an elderly, seriously ill, injured, or disabled member, and nearly 6 in 10 (57%) think they might need leave to treat or recover a serious illness of their own; just under 4 in 10 (39%) who think they might need leave to care for a new baby or adopted child.
- **And, most think that families face serious financial difficulties without paid leave.** Two-thirds of voters (66%) say they would face serious financial hardships if they had to take up to a few months of unpaid leave. Nearly half of women (48%) say serious financial hardships would be very likely, as well as more than half of non-metro residents (52%). And, a strong majority, 9 in 10 voters, do not think most people who work in the U.S. can afford to take up to a few months of unpaid time off from their job if they have a new child, a serious illness or injury, or a family member who is seriously ill, injured, or disabled.
- **Supporting a comprehensive national paid leave policy is smart politics, regardless of party.** Seven in ten voters (70%), and majorities of every partisan voting group, say their party should support a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave policy that covers all working people. In addition, the overwhelming majority of voters – including 95 percent of Democrats, 77 percent of Independents and 72 percent of Republicans – say it is important for this year's congressional candidates to support a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave plan. This sentiment is translated into their voting preferences, too. For younger voters and women, it is especially important that candidates support a comprehensive plan, and could be a motivating voting issue in November.

Based on this survey, as well as focus groups with conservative and independents voters in the fall of 2017, and other public opinion research on this topic, here is some suggested messaging advice on the issue of a national paid family and medical leave policy for elected officials, candidates and others interested in this issue.

1. **A comprehensive policy starts from a position of strength.** Voters support a comprehensive national paid family and medical leave policy that covers all working people for all FMLA purposes – caring for a new child, a seriously ill or injured family member, their own serious health condition and to address the deployment or injury of a military service member in their family. They feel narrow parental leave policies are not enough. This is a settled matter for them, and you can feel comfortable advocating for it. Voters are looking for elected officials as well as 2018 candidates to support a comprehensive policy.
2. **Draw on voters' own experiences.** A majority of voters have already dealt with a serious personal or family medical need or the arrival of a child that forced them to make sacrifices. And most voters say they would face financial duress if they had to take months of unpaid leave to care for a new child, an ill family member, their own illness, or are impacted by a military deployment. Voters believe that a national paid leave policy fills a gap that will improve families' financial security and that no one should miss the important first moments in their children's lives or the last moments of their loved ones'. Ground your support for national paid leave in tangible examples of how it could help voters in the future, particularly in caring for an older or ill family member.
3. **Highlight current disparities in leave policies, especially in changing economy.** Most voters think (correctly) that only a small segment of workers currently have access to paid leave. But, they think all workers – including self-employed and contract workers, and higher-, middle- and lower-income workers – should have these benefits as well as those employed by large corporations and small businesses. Focus on how most Americans would stand to gain from a national, comprehensive policy. It could also be useful to highlight how people who are working within the (ever-growing) gig-economy will benefit.
4. **Advocate for a shared employee-employer contribution model.** Although voters can be wary of any changes to worker wages, the survey shows they are overwhelmingly willing to pay for paid leave benefits, and are most supportive of a funding model that shares contributions between employee and employers. Focus groups among conservative and independent voters validate that this was viewed as a reasonable approach with voters. This is a good and safe place for you to be on this issue.
5. **Voice clear opposition to using Social Security funds.** Arguing against the use of Social Security funds is a winning position. This idea is hugely unpopular with voters across the political spectrum and is seen as the least palatable policy approach moving forward. The Rubio proposal would require a lifetime benefit cut of 3% for a two-month leave for one

child and up to 10% for three 2-month leaves. Voters will be on your side if you come out against changes to Social Security as a solution for national paid leave.

For more information about this survey, please contact:

Mike Perry, Partner, PerryUndem

mike@perryundem.com

Christine Matthews, President, Bellwether Research

cmatthews@bellwether-research.com

Vicki Shabo, Vice President, National Partnership for Women & Families

vshabo@nationalpartnership.org