Paid Leave Means A Stronger Colorado

FEBRUARY 2022

Colorado will soon be home to the tenth state paid family and medical leave program in the United States. Colorado’s program, the first to be enacted through a ballot initiative, will go fully into effect in 2024. The program builds on lessons learned from older state programs to be one of the most progressive in the nation, including job protection, a progressive wage replacement rate and an inclusive definition of “family” for family caregiving.¹

The pandemic has left Coloradans struggling with their health, finances and the ability to work. Paid leave means being able to cope with work and bills during a health crisis.

- Nearly 1.3 million Coloradans have contracted COVID-19, with older adults and people of color especially affected.² Up to one in four will experience “long-haul COVID” symptoms including difficulty breathing, headache, dizziness, chest pain or fatigue that may require care from a loved one or interfere with work.³
- In January 2022, more than 179,000 Californians were not working because they were sick with or caring for someone with COVID-19, and more than 81,000 due to another illness or disability.⁴

Coloradans are caught between their work and family responsibilities. Paid leave means not having to choose between job and family.

- Nearly 61,500 children are born in Colorado each year, and in 70 percent of all Colorado households with children – more than 830,000 homes – all parents have paying jobs.⁵
- Women’s wages support their households. In California, 62 percent of Black mothers, 46 percent of white mothers, 49 percent of Latina mothers and 41 of AAPI mothers are key family breadwinners. State-level data is limited, but nationally 64 percent of Native American mothers are breadwinners.⁶
- Women make up nearly half of California’s labor force (46 percent) and more than one-quarter of its business owners (29 percent).⁷
- Across the country, many men want to play a larger role in caring for their children, but unsupportive policies and stigma hold them back.⁸
Colorado families will face increased family and medical care needs. Paid leave means older adults and working people of all ages can get the support they need to receive and provide critical care.

- More than one in five workers are 55 and older.\(^9\)
- In the next 20 years, the share of the state’s population age 65 and older will grow by one-eighth.\(^10\)
- Older workers are more likely to experience serious medical conditions that require care.\(^11\)

Colorado will soon see the benefits of paid leave for workers, families and businesses. Paid leave means people – especially women – aren’t forced to leave the labor force to care for their families or health, reducing turnover for employers of all sizes and boosting the economy.

- Paid leave helps improve health outcomes and helps working people remain economically secure and stay connected to their jobs.\(^12\)
- Businesses’ employee retention can also improve significantly with paid leave, helping to strengthen bottom lines.\(^13\)
- State programs are used as intended by workers without overburdening employers.\(^14\)

Colorado will soon add to the growing body of evidence that paid leave programs work – a common sense, tested approach that works for families, businesses and economies.

But people’s access to paid leave shouldn’t depend on where they live or work or what job they hold. The United States needs a common sense, national paid leave program that:

- Includes all workers, no matter where they live or work or what kind of job they have;
- Replaces enough income that workers at any income level can afford leave;
- Provides enough time for workers to meet their care and health needs;
- Covers the range of major needs workers face, including to address their own health conditions, to care for seriously ill, injured or disabled family members and to welcome newborn, newly adopted or foster children; and
- Has a sustainable funding source that is affordable for workers, employers and the government without harming other essential programs.

**National paid family and medical leave means a stronger economy, healthier families and businesses, and greater equality for all women and families.**

To learn more, visit [NationalPartnership.org/PaidLeave](http://NationalPartnership.org/PaidLeave).
6 Shaw, E., Mason, C. N., Lacarte, V., & Jauregui, E. (2020, May). Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID-19. Retrieved 26 January 2022, from Institute for Women’s Policy Research website: http://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf; "Key breadwinner" means a single mother who heads a household or a married mother who contributes 40 percent or more of the couple’s joint earnings. Nationally, 79 percent of Black mothers are key breadwinners; 64 percent of Native American mothers are key breadwinners; 60 percent of mothers identifying as multiracial or "other" race are key breadwinners; 49 percent of Latina mothers are key breadwinners; 48 percent of white mothers are key breadwinners; and 43 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers are key breadwinners.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.

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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