The vast majority of working people in the United States do not have paid family leave through their jobs. In Iowa, even unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 61 percent of working people. This means Iowans face impossible choices when new children are born or adopted and when serious personal or family health needs inevitably arise.

Iowans are caught between their work and family responsibilities.

- More than 37,000 children are born in Iowa each year, and in 80 percent of all Iowa households with children – more than 560,000 homes – all parents have paying jobs.
- Women’s wages support their households. In Iowa, 55 percent of white mothers and 54 percent of Latina mothers are key family breadwinners.
- Women make up nearly half of Iowa’s labor force (48 percent) and more than one-quarter of its business owners (26 percent).
- Across the country, many men want to play a larger role in caring for their children, but unsupportive policies and stigma hold them back.

Paid leave means not having to choose between job and family.

Iowa families will face increased family and medical care needs.

- Nearly 1 in 4 workers is age 55 and older.
- In less than 15 years, the share of the state’s population age 65 and older will grow by nearly 30 percent.
- Older workers are more likely to experience serious medical conditions that require care.
- One person dies every day from a drug overdose in Iowa.

Paid leave means older adults and working people of all ages can get the support they need to receive and provide critical care.

The state’s caregiving needs are significant, and growing.
Impossible choices between job and family are hurting the economy, and women suffer most.

- In Iowa, there is a 10 percentage point gap in labor force participation between men and women, in part because the United States lacks family friendly policies.\(^{12}\)
- Nationally, if women participated in the U.S. labor force at the same rates as women in countries with paid leave, our economy would benefit from more than $500 billion in additional economic activity each year.\(^{13}\)
- Paid leave improves employee retention, morale and productivity, strengthening bottom lines – but small employers often cannot provide it on their own.\(^{14}\)

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.

Iowans need a common sense solution to address the country’s paid leave crisis.

An effective paid leave policy would:

- Cover all working people, apply equally to men and women and reflect a modern definition of family;
- Include the well-established reasons people need family and medical leave;
- Provide at least 12 weeks of leave and replace a substantial share of workers’ usual wages; and
- Be cost-effective for workers, small employers and the government;
- Protect workers against adverse consequences for taking leave.

The Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act is the only federal proposal that aligns with these criteria. And the sustainable national fund it would create would reduce the number of working families in Iowa facing significant economic insecurity when they need to take family and medical leave by 81 percent.\(^{15}\)

The FAMILY Act means a stronger economy, healthier families and businesses, and greater equality for all women and families.

For more on the FAMILY Act, visit NationalPartnership.org/theFAMILYAct.

2 diversitydatakids.org. (2015). Working Adults Who Are Eligible For and Can Afford FMLA Unpaid Leave (Share). Retrieved 6 January 2020 from Brandeis University. The Heller School, Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy website http://www.diversitydatakids.org/data/ranking/529/working-adults-who-are-eligible-for-and-can-afford-fmla-unpaid-leave-share/#loct=2&cat=44,258&ftf=17; Workers are considered unable to take unpaid FMLA leave because they are either ineligible based on employer size or job tenure requirements or because 32.3 days of lost wages from unpaid leave, the average length of an FMLA leave, would result in their family income dropping to or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.


4 Anderson, J. (2016, September 8). Breadwinner Mothers by Race/Ethnicity and State. Retrieved 6 January 2020, from Institute for Women’s Policy Research website: https://wpw.org/publications/breadwinner-mothers-by-race-ethnicity-and-state/; “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, 81 percent of Black mothers are key breadwinners; 67 percent of Native American mothers are key breadwinners; 53 percent of Latina mothers are key breadwinners; 60 percent of mothers identifying as multiracial or “other” race are key breadwinners; 53 percent of Latina mothers are key breadwinners; 50 percent of white mothers are key breadwinners; and 44 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers are key breadwinners.


12 See note 8. (Unpublished calculation by the National Partnership for Women & Families of the difference in labor force participation rates for adult women and men by age category)

13 See note 7.


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

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