The vast majority of working people in the United States do not have paid family leave through their jobs. In Virginia, even unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 55 percent of working people. As the coronavirus pandemic made clear, the lack of paid leave has had devastating costs to Virginians and their families, public health and the economy.

The coronavirus pandemic will have long-term consequences on Virginians’ health, caregiving needs and economic stability.

- Women, especially Black, Latinx, AAPI and Native American mothers, were hit hardest by pandemic closures, working in many of the most-affected industries and bearing the brunt of increased caregiving without schools or child care. At the end of 2020, Virginia’s labor force had lost 17,000 workers and nearly eight times as many women were unemployed compared to one year earlier. If nothing is done, women nationwide will lose $64.5 billion in wages each year from reduced labor force participation and lower work hours.
- More than 760,000 Virginians – 28 percent Black, 9 percent Latinx and 7 percent AAPI – work in frontline industries, facing heightened risks of exposure and challenges managing family caregiving needs.
- More than 418,000 Virginians contracted COVID-19 in the first year of the pandemic. An estimated 10 to 15 percent – 41,800 to 62,700 – will experience long-term symptoms including difficulty breathing, chest pain or fatigue that may require care from a loved one or interfere with work.

Paid leave means a more robust, equitable recovery from the pandemic.

Virginians are caught between their work and family responsibilities.

- More than 97,300 children are born in Virginia each year, and in 74 percent of all Virginia households with children – nearly 1.3 million homes – all parents have paying jobs.
- Women’s wages support their households. In Virginia, 73 percent of Black mothers, 46 percent of white mothers, 45 percent of Latina mothers and 40 of AAPI mothers are key family breadwinners. State-level data is limited, but nationally 64 percent of Native American mothers are breadwinners.
- Women make up nearly half of Virginia’s labor force (49 percent) and nearly one-third of its business owners (30 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.

Virginia families will face increased family and medical care needs.

- One in four workers is age 55 and older.
- In the next 20 years, the share of the state’s population age 65 and older will grow by nearly one-sixth.
- Older workers are more likely to experience serious medical conditions that require care.

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

Impossible choices between job and family are hurting the economy, and women suffer most.

- In Virginia, there is a 13 percentage point gap in labor force participation between men and women, in part because the United States lacks family friendly policies.
- 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.
- Paid leave improves employee retention, morale and productivity, strengthening bottom lines – but small employers often cannot provide it on their own.

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.

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

Virginians need the Family And Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act, a common sense solution to address the country’s paid leave crisis. The FAMILY Act would reduce the number of working families in Virginia facing significant economic insecurity when they need to take family and medical leave by 83 percent. Seventy-nine percent of 2020 voters – 67 percent of Republicans, 77 percent of Independents and 93 percent of Democrats – support a permanent paid family and medical leave program for people with health needs or child or family care.

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.
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.


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 14 January 2021, 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.

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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