Paid Leave Means A Stronger West Virginia

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The vast majority of working people in the United States do not have paid family leave through their jobs.\(^1\) In West Virginia, even unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 61 percent of working people.\(^2\) This means West Virginians face impossible choices when new children are born or adopted and when serious personal or family health needs inevitably arise.

**West Virginians are caught between their work and family responsibilities.**

- More than 18,000 children are born in West Virginia each year, and in 65 percent of all West Virginia households with children – more than 210,000 homes – all parents have paying jobs.\(^3\)
- Women make up nearly half of West Virginia’s labor force (47 percent) and more than one-quarter of its business owners (28 percent).\(^4\)
- Across the country, many men want to play a larger role in caring for their children,\(^5\) but unsupportive policies and stigma hold them back.\(^6\)

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

**West Virginia families will face increased family and medical care needs.**

- Nearly 1 in 4 workers is age 55 and older.\(^7\)
- In less than 15 years, the share of the state’s population age 65 and older will grow by more than one-third.\(^8\)
- Older workers are more likely to experience serious medical conditions that require care.\(^9\)
- Three people die every day from drug overdoses in West Virginia.\(^10\)

**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 West Virginia, there is a 9 percentage point gap in labor force participation between men and women, in part because the United States lacks family friendly policies.¹¹
- 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.¹²
- Paid leave improves employee retention, morale and productivity, strengthening bottom lines – but small employers often cannot provide it on their own.¹³

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.

West Virginians 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 West Virginia facing significant economic insecurity when they need to take family and medical leave by 76 percent.¹⁴

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.
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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