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The vast majority of working people in the United States do not have paid family leave through their jobs,¹ including about 77 percent of working people — about 2,216,000 workers — in Wisconsin. Even unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 61 percent of Wisconsinites.² The lack of paid leave has devastating costs for Wisconsinites and their families, public health and the economy.

Impossible choices between work and family are hurting Wisconsin’s economy, and women suffer most. 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.

- If women in Wisconsin participated in the labor force at the same rate as women in countries with paid leave, there would be more than 14,000 additional workers in the state and $616,599,000 more in wages earned statewide.³
- Nationally, if women participated in the U.S. labor force at that rate, our economy would benefit from more than $650 billion in additional economic activity each year.⁴
- Paid leave improves employee retention, morale and productivity, strengthening bottom lines — but small employers often cannot provide the benefit — and universal paid leave would help them do that.⁵

The pandemic has left Wisconsinites 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.

- More than 1,526,000 Wisconsinites have contracted COVID-19, with older adults and people of color especially affected.⁶ 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.⁷
- In Wisconsin, a typical worker who takes four weeks of unpaid leave loses nearly $3,200 in income.⁸
- Since 2020, Wisconsin workers sick with COVID-19 have lost an estimated $723.5 million in wages due to lack of or inadequate paid leave.⁹
- In January 2022, nearly 114,700 Wisconsinites were not working because they were sick with or caring for someone with COVID-19, and more than 114,300 due to another illness or disability.
Wisconsinites are caught between their work and family responsibilities. Paid leave means not having to choose between job and family.

- About 60,500 children are born in Wisconsin each year, and in 78 percent of all Wisconsin households with children — more than 930,000 homes — all parents report to work.10
- Women’s wages support their households. In Wisconsin, 87 percent of Black mothers, 52 percent of white mothers, 54 percent of Latina mothers and 48 of AAPI mothers are key family breadwinners. State-level data is limited, but nationally 64 percent of Native American mothers are breadwinners.11
- Women make up nearly half of Wisconsin’s labor force (48 percent) and more than one-quarter of its business owners (26 percent).12
- Across the country, many men want to play a larger role in caring for their children, but unsupportive policies and stigma hold them back.13

Wisconsin 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.

- One in four workers is 55 and older.14
- In the next 20 years, the share of the state’s population age 65 and older will grow by more than one-fifth.15
- Older workers are more likely to experience serious medical conditions that require care.16
- A national paid leave program could add about 102,300 family caregivers to Wisconsin’s workforce by 2030.17

Wisconsinites need a common sense, national paid leave program. We recommend one 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.


2 diversitydatakids.org. (2020). Working adults who are eligible and can afford FMLA unpaid leave (percent) by race/ethnicity. Retrieved 26 January 2022 from Brandeis University, The Heller School, Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy website https://data.diversitydatakids.org/dataset/fmla_a_eligaff_re_p-working-adults-who-are-eligible-and-can-afford-fmla-unpaid-leave-percent--by-ra; 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 Ibid.


11 Shaw, E., Mason, C. N., Lacarte, V., & Jauregui, E. (2020, May). Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwiners 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.


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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