

June 21, 2022

Dear Members of the Conference Committee on Bipartisan Innovation and Competition Legislation,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations and the tens of millions of working families we represent, we urge you to support inclusion of Sec. 10503 of the America COMPETES Act/Sec. 2215 of USICA in a final conference agreement. This provision would increase flexibility for individuals working in the sciences when they have caregiving responsibilities, which will promote gender equity in the sciences and ensure that people have the time they need to care for their families.

It is incredibly likely that over the course of a person's life, they will need to provide care to a family member – whether it be a new child, a spouse, a parent, or another close relationship. Due to a variety of reasons, including the high cost of professional long-term care services and our aging population, many caregivers also participate in the workforce. In 2020, one in five adults aged 18 to 64, or 43.5 million people, provided care for another person.<sup>1</sup> Sixty-one percent of those caregivers, or 26.5 million people, had been employed within the prior twelve months, and one-third (37 percent) work full time.<sup>2</sup> More than one in five workers aged 45 to 64 report being a caregiver to a parent – and more than half of these workers report that caregiving negatively affects their work.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the high prevalence of family caregivers, there are very few protections and supports offered to them at the federal level. More than forty percent of workers are not even eligible for unpaid, job-protected leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act,<sup>4</sup> meaning taking time off to care for a loved one could mean losing their job. Even those whose jobs are protected by the FMLA often must take leave without pay. Only 23 percent of the workforce has paid family leave through their employer,<sup>5</sup> leaving people with caregiving responsibilities on their own to make difficult choices between their families and their livelihood. Individual states have tried to bridge the gap, with twelve states (including the District of Columbia) enacting paid family and medical leave laws,<sup>6</sup> but caregivers in the other 39 states are left without this economic support. A recent study by the National Partnership for Women & Families found that even just a four-week national paid leave program would add six million caregivers to the workforce by 2030, or 760,000 caregivers annually from 2022 to 2030.<sup>7</sup>

The lack of support for caregivers in the workplace hurts everyone, but women, and particularly women of color, have continued to bear disproportionate responsibilities for caregiving and are especially hurt by the lack of supportive caregiving policies.<sup>8</sup> During 2020 alone, more than 65 million women provided unpaid care in the form of child care, family care and eldercare, and a majority did so while holding full- or part-time jobs.<sup>9</sup> Most women do not have the option to

choose between paid work and unpaid caregiving responsibilities. For example, the majority of mothers – including nearly 80 percent of Black mothers – are key breadwinners for their families, meaning their households rely heavily on their wages to make ends meet and get ahead.<sup>10</sup> When women are forced to balance their work and caregiving responsibilities without adequate workplace supports, they are likely to limit work hours or turn down promotions or important projects,<sup>11</sup> which lowers their lifetime earnings and retirement savings and is a driver of the gender wage gap.

The trends are no different in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, where women make up only 28 percent of the workforce. Gender and racial gaps are particularly high in some of the fastest-growing and highest-paid jobs of the future, like computer science and engineering.<sup>12</sup> Women in STEM fields face the compounding problems of societal factors that have traditionally kept them out of these fields, including gender bias and stereotypes,<sup>13</sup> along with the broader problems facing women in the workforce, like a lack of supportive policies for caregivers. Pandemic-related caregiving demands have further disrupted the careers of many women in STEM, meaning that the need to address these issues is especially urgent.<sup>14</sup>

Section 10503 of the America COMPETES Act of 2022 (COMPETES) and Section 2215 of the United States Innovation and Competition Act of 2021 (USICA) would take the first step toward making sure that people in STEM fields are not penalized for their caregiving responsibilities, helping level the playing field for women in STEM fields. This provision requires each federal science agency to establish policies that allow for flexibility regarding the timing of federal research grants if a principal investigator of a grant has caregiving responsibilities. This includes flexibility in timing for the initiation of approved research awards; no-cost extensions of such research awards; and grant supplements to research awards to sustain research activities conducted under such awards. The provision does not alter the benefit policies at any individual institution, but rather removes a barrier currently in place by the federal government that prevents flexibility.

This provision will help give caregivers in STEM fields the support they need to care for their families without sacrificing their jobs and income. It will help women in STEM fields who are already at a disadvantage due to past and present biases, and will encourage men in these fields to take on more caregiving responsibilities at home.

We urge the conference committee to enact this provision, along with the language in the COMPETES Act that requires the Federal science agencies to collect data on the usage of these policies. In the absence of a broader federal approach to support caregivers, this provision allowing for flexibility for caregivers in STEM fields is an important step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

9to5

AFL-CIO

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI)

Center for WorkLife Law, University of California, Hastings Law

Equal Rights Advocates

Institute for Women's Policy Research

Legal Aid at Work

Main Street Alliance

MomsRising

National Employment Law Project

National Employment Lawyers Association

National Partnership for Women & Families

National Women's Law Center

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice

Oxfam America

Paid Leave for All

Paid Leave for the U.S. (PL+US)

Public Advocacy for Kids (PAK)

The Arc of the United States

UsAgainstAlzheimers

Women Employed

YWCA USA

ZERO TO THREE

cc: Speaker Nancy Pelosi

Majority Leader Chuck Schumer

Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy

Minority Leader Mitch McConnell

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<sup>1</sup> AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving. (2020). *Caregiving in the U.S. 2020 Report (Figure 1)*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2020/05/full-report-caregiving-in-the-united-states.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00103.001.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid (Figure 63). Population estimate based on the estimate that 82 percent of adult caregivers are 18 to 65 years old (see Figure 3).

<sup>3</sup> Atkinson, I. (2021, September). *Our Aging, Caring Nation: Why A U.S. Paid Leave Plan Must Provide More Than Time to Care for New Children*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from National Partnership for Women & Families website: <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/our-aging-caring-nation.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Brown, S., Herr, J., Roy, R., & Klerman, J. A.. (2020, July). Employee and Worksite Perspectives of the Family and Medical Leave Act: Results from the 2018 Surveys (Exhibit 2-1). Retrieved 26 May 2022, from U.S. Department of Labor website:

[https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/WHD\\_FMLA2018SurveyResults\\_FinalReport\\_Aug2020.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/WHD_FMLA2018SurveyResults_FinalReport_Aug2020.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2021, September). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2021 (Table 33)*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2021/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2021.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> National Partnership for Women & Families. (2022, May). *State Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Laws*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/state-paid-family-leave-laws.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Novello, A. (2021, November.) *Paid Leave Could Keep More Than 6 Million Caregivers Connected to the Labor Force by 2030*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from National Partnership for Women & Families website: <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/paid-leave-caregivers-connected-2030.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Mason, J. & Molina Acosta, P. (2021, March). *Called to Care: A Racially Just Recovery Demands Paid Family and Medical Leave*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from National Partnership for Women & Families website: <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/reports/called-to-care-a-racially-just-demands-paid-family-and-medical-leave.html>

<sup>9</sup> National Partnership for Women & Families. (2021, May). *Women Carried the Burden of Unpaid Caregiving in 2020*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from National Partnership for Women & Families website: <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/women-carried-the-burden-of-unpaid-caregiving-in-2020.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Shaw, E., Mason, C., Lacarte, V., & Jauregui, E. (2020, May). *Holding Up Half the Sky: Mothers as Workers, Primary Caregivers, & Breadwinners During COVID-19 (Table 1)*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from Institute for Women's Policy Research website: <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Holding-Up-Half-the-Sky-Mothers-as-Breadwinners.pdf> (Breadwinner mothers are defined as single mothers who head a household or married mothers who generate at least 40 percent of a household's joint income.)

<sup>11</sup> See note 9.

<sup>12</sup> American Association of University Women. (n.d.) *The STEM Gap: Women and Girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from <https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/the-stem-gap/>; Hill, C., & Corbett, C. (2020). *Solving the Equation: The Variables for Success in Engineering and Computing*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from American Association of University Women website: <https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2020/03/Solving-the-Equation-report-nsa.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Dahlberg, M.L., & Higginbotham, E., eds. (2021, March). *The Impact of COVID-19 on the Careers of Women in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*. Retrieved 26 May 2022, from National Academies of Science website: <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26061/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-careers-of-women-in-academic-sciences-engineering-and-medicine>