

# Children Benefit When Parents Have Access to Paid Leave

MARCH 2015

Parents need to be able to care for ill or newborn children. But the 21st century reality is that most parents work. In fact, most children live in households with a single parent or parents who both hold jobs.<sup>1</sup> Without job-protected paid leave that enables a parent to take a small number of weeks out of the workforce, parents may face an impossible choice between their child's health and their income or jobs. This is why working parents – and their children – need a comprehensive paid family and medical leave (“paid leave”) standard.

## Paid Leave Improves Children's Health and Strengthens Families

**Paid leave allows new parents time to care for their children – giving them the best chance at a healthy start in life.**

- ▶ Working mothers who receive job-protected paid leave are more likely to take at least the minimum six to eight weeks of leave recommended by physicians.<sup>2</sup> Newborns whose mothers take longer leaves are more likely to be taken to the pediatrician for regular check-ups and immunizations and more likely to be breastfed.<sup>3</sup> An additional 10 weeks of paid leave for new parents, on average, reduces post-neonatal mortality by up to 4.5 percent.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ In California, where a statewide paid leave program was instituted in 2004, mothers who use the program are more likely to initiate breastfeeding and to continue breastfeeding for approximately twice as long as mothers who do not use the program.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ The California program has also doubled the average length of leave taken by new mothers from three weeks to between six and seven weeks. The greatest gains are among mothers with lower levels of education, unmarried mothers, Latina mothers and Black mothers.<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Men who take two or more weeks off after the birth of a child are more involved than fathers who take no leave in the direct care of their children nine months later.<sup>7</sup>

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**Under the California paid family leave program, the average length of leave for new mothers has *doubled*, with the greatest impact among Latina and African American women and women in lower-wage jobs.**

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## **Both healthy and sick children fare better when parents have paid leave.**

- ▶ Studies show that sick children recover faster when cared for by their parents. The presence of a parent shortens a child's hospital stay by 31 percent.<sup>8</sup> And active parental involvement in a child's hospital care may head off future health care needs, partly due to increased parental education and awareness.<sup>9</sup>
- ▶ International analyses show that, where parents are entitled to leave, children experience better health outcomes and lower rates of mortality.<sup>10</sup>

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**“I was able to be completely focused on our baby while I was at home. The late nights I spent up were focused on whether she was hungry or needed changing... Since jumping back into work, I've realized that I'm still moving forward in my career. ”**

— Farah S., California Mom (2013)

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## **Too Few Working Parents Have Access to Paid Leave**

### **Working parents' access to paid leave is woefully minimal.**

- ▶ Today, a meager 13 percent of workers have access to paid family leave through their employers.<sup>11</sup> Fewer than 40 percent of workers have access to employer-provided short-term disability insurance, which provides partial pay to women recovering from pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>12</sup>
- ▶ The percentage of employers offering fully paid maternity leave has declined substantially in recent years, dropping from 17 percent in 2005 to nine percent in 2014.<sup>13</sup> And only half of first-time mothers take any type of paid leave (including sick and vacation time) around their child's birth, indicating that paid leave is not available to many who need it. This proportion has not changed significantly in more than a decade.<sup>14</sup>

### **Unpaid leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act is simply not enough.**

- ▶ In all, slightly less than 60 percent of the workforce (about 90 million workers) has access to unpaid leave under the FMLA.<sup>15</sup> But that means that four in 10 workers – or about 60 million – are left out by the law's exclusions of employees in smaller businesses, employees with less than a year on the job and employees who work part time.<sup>16</sup>
- ▶ And even when the FMLA provides protection, millions of workers can't afford to take leave without pay. The most common reason provided by workers who needed FMLA leave but did not take it was that they couldn't take unpaid time off.<sup>17</sup>

## **Working Families Need a Paid Leave Standard**

Working parents should not have to risk their family's economic security to meet their caregiving obligations. Helping mothers and fathers reduce the tensions between their work and family responsibilities improves children's health and strengthens parental involvement.

**A comprehensive paid family and medical leave law would allow workers to care for their child's health and allow new parents time to bond with their child – while keeping their jobs.**

California, New Jersey and Rhode Island have already implemented effective paid family leave programs and momentum is building nationwide. The time for action is now. For more information and to get involved, go to [www.NationalPartnership.org](http://www.NationalPartnership.org).

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- 4 Ruhm, C. J. (2000). Parental leave and child health. *Journal of Health Economics*, 19(6), 931-960.
- 5 Appelbaum, E., & Milkman, R. (2011). *Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California*. Center for Economic Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 4 March 2015, from <http://www.cepr.net/index.php/publications/reports/leaves-that-pay>
- 6 Rossin-Slater, M., Ruhm, C., & Waldfogel, J. *The Effects of California's Paid Family Leave Program on Mothers' Leave-taking and Subsequent Labor Market Outcomes*. National Bureau of Economic Research Publication. Retrieved 4 March 2015, from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17715>
- 7 Nepomnyaschy, L., & Waldfogel, J. (2007). Paternity Leave and Fathers' Involvement with their Young Children. *Community, Work, and Family*, 10(4).
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- 9 Heymann, J., & Earle, A. (2010). *Raising the global floor: dismantling the myth that we can't afford good working conditions for everyone*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Politics and Policy.
- 10 See note 4.
- 11 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014, September). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2014* (Table 32). Retrieved 4 March 2015, from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2014/ebbl0055.pdf>
- 12 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014, September). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2014* (Table 16). Retrieved 4 March 2015, from <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2014/ebbl0055.pdf>
- 13 Matos, K., & Galinsky, E. (2014). *2014 National Study of Employers*. Families and Work Institute Publication. Retrieved 26 July 2014, from <http://familiesandwork.org/downloads/2014NationalStudyOfEmployers.pdf>; Galinsky, E., Aumann, K., & Bond, J. (2011, August). *2008 National Study of the Changing Workforce*. Families and Work Institute Publication. Retrieved 4 March 2015, from [http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/Times\\_Are\\_Changing.pdf](http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/Times_Are_Changing.pdf)
- 14 Laughlin, L. (2011, October). *Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers: 1961-2008*. U.S. Census Bureau Publication. Retrieved 4 March 2015, from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p70-128.pdf>
- 15 Klerman, J., Daley, K., & Pozniak, A. (2012, September 7). *Family and Medical Leave in 2012: Technical Report* (p. 21). Abt Associates Publication. Retrieved 4 March 2015, from <http://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/fmla/FMLA-2012-Technical-Report.pdf>
- 16 National Partnership for Women & Families calculation based on FMLA access rate as reported in Klerman et al. (note 15) multiplied by the number of employed civilian population reported in U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014, July 3). *Table A-1, Employment status of the civilian population by age and sex*. Retrieved 5 March 2015, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t01.htm>. Looking at just the private sector, about 50 million workers are not protected by the FMLA. Private sector calculations based on same calculation as described above using *Table A-8, Employed persons by class of worker and part-time status*. Retrieved 5 March 2015, from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t08.htm>; See also Jorgensen, H., & Appelbaum, E. (2014, February 5). *Expanding Federal Family and Medical Leave Coverage: Who Benefits from Changes in Eligibility Requirements?* (pp. 6-7). Center for Economic and Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 5 March 2015, from <http://www.cepr.net/documents/fmla-eligibility-2014-01.pdf>
- 17 See note 15.

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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 [www.NationalPartnership.org](http://www.NationalPartnership.org).

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