

September 15, 2015

Dear Members of Congress:

We, the undersigned 203 business school faculty members from 88 institutions across the country, write this letter in support of making paid family and medical leave available to all working families.* Sound business practices, data from other countries, our own research with employers, employees and organizations, and our experiences teaching the business leaders of tomorrow compel our conclusion that the United States must adopt a national paid family and medical leave policy.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 13 percent of the United States workforce has access to paid family leave through their employers, and less than 40 percent has access to personal medical leave through employer-provided short-term disability insurance.¹ And while the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides important job protection for workers taking unpaid time off to care for new children and serious personal or family illnesses, less than 60 percent of the workforce is eligible for its protections – and many workers who are eligible and need FMLA leave cannot afford to take it.²

Even among the most highly paid and sought after employees, business policies, practices and culture too often discourage or prevent women, and men, from taking the time they need to care for a new child or address a serious health condition. As a result, the future business leaders we teach are deeply concerned about the challenges that could thwart their family and career ambitions. Millennials are experiencing more intense conflicts between family and career. They often face increased time requirements at work, higher student debt loads, and stronger competition in the labor market.³ Being a parent is still very important for most young people, but there are indications that many simply do not see how they can manage it. Increasingly, some men and women are opting out of parenthood altogether.⁴

The Business Benefits of Paid Leave

Some companies have experienced success in proactively implementing practices designed to improve employee performance at work and at home, such as offering paid parental leave. These businesses find that when workers are able to devote more time and attention to their home lives, they experience a stronger sense of control, less stress, and are more efficient, engaged and productive at work. Workers feel greater loyalty and commitment to their organizations and improve their leadership skills.⁵

Across the private sector workforce, first-time mothers who take paid maternity leave are more likely than mothers who do not take maternity leave to return to work – and to return to the same employer.⁶ People who are dealing with personal health issues or caring for a loved one are better able to stay employed when they have paid leave and other family friendly policies.⁷

Businesses also experience cost-savings and other benefits when workers can take paid leave to address family and medical needs. For example, paid family and medical leave aids retention. Retention is critical for employers seeking to control costs and maximize productivity. For high-wage, high-skilled workers in fields including technology, accounting and law, turnover costs can amount to 213 percent of workers' salaries.⁸ Across all occupations, median turnover costs are estimated to be 21 percent of workers' annual wages.⁹

Experiences at companies like Google and Ernst & Young show clear relationships between paid leave and retention.¹⁰ The accounting firm KPMG estimates that businesses worldwide could save up to \$19 billion annually in recruiting and training costs by offering 16 weeks of fully paid maternity leave.¹¹ Higher retention rates mean saved separation costs, unemployment insurance savings, lower temporary staffing costs, fewer costs associated with searching for and interviewing new workers, and training costs for new workers.¹² Higher retention rates also reduce the indirect costs that can arise from lost productivity leading up to and after employee separations, diminished output as new workers ramp up, reduced morale and lost institutional knowledge.¹³ Paid leave reduces employee turnover and workers who cover for employees on leave get a chance to take on new responsibilities and further their development.¹⁴

Lessons from Successful State Programs

Evidence from the private sector's voluntary policies is reinforced by the experiences of the three states that have adopted paid family leave insurance programs. California, New Jersey and Rhode Island have successfully implemented paid family leave programs that demonstrate how well paid leave insurance works.¹⁵

California's program, in place for more than a decade, is the most studied. In California, workers have filed approximately 1.7 million leave claims since the state implemented its family leave insurance program in 2004.¹⁶ California families have experienced positive economic and health effects.¹⁷ Parents who use the California paid family leave program are much more likely than those who do not to report that leave has a positive effect on their ability to care for their new children and arrange child care.¹⁸ Newborns whose mothers take at least 12 weeks of paid leave are more likely to be breastfed, receive medical checkups and get critical immunizations.¹⁹ A recent review of international literature concludes that there are benefits for maternal health when fathers take paid leave, including a reduction in maternal illness and depression and an increase in well-being.²⁰ In California, the number of fathers filing leave claims increased by more than 400 percent between 2005 and 2013, as the state's program became better established and known.²¹

Experiences of businesses in California and New Jersey also show positive impacts and lay bare the claims of business opponents. The vast majority of California employers report seeing a positive impact on employee productivity, profitability and performance, or no effect.²² Even the Society for Human Resource Management, one of the chief opponents of paid family leave in California, issued a report finding that the law had created "relatively few" new burdens for employers and that employers' concerns about the program "have so

far not been realized.”²³ Similarly, in a report prepared on behalf of the New Jersey Business and Industry Association, both small and large businesses said they had adjusted easily to the state’s family leave insurance law and experienced no effects on business profitability, performance or employee productivity.²⁴ Another survey of New Jersey employers found that most employers did not experience negative effects on profitability or increased paperwork, and no employers were aware of a single instance of the program being abused.²⁵

A National Paid Leave Standard

All of the available research – from employer-generated studies to analyses of the state paid family leave programs in California, New Jersey and Rhode Island, to data that reflect the experiences of people fortunate enough to work for employers that offer some form of paid leave, to analyses of parents’ experiences in other countries – demonstrates the clear benefits of paid leave.

It is time to ensure that the entire United States workforce has access to paid family and medical leave. The nation must adopt a policy built for the populations and workforces of today and tomorrow, one that recognizes that entrepreneurship, mobility and care needs are all on the rise but so is the creation of low-wage jobs that offer few benefits to employees.

The Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act (FAMILY Act) provides one such solution that we urge you to consider. The FAMILY Act builds on the lessons of California, New Jersey and Rhode Island and the lessons from international examples to create a national program that would set a basic paid leave standard for all workers, no matter where they live or work.

The FAMILY Act employs a familiar, tested insurance pool framework and spreads the cost of leave between employers and employees in a way that is affordable and responsible. Employers who offer generous benefit packages would, like some 60 percent of California employers, see a cost savings.²⁶ Employers whose profit margins are too thin to shoulder the full cost of an employee’s leave would have the peace of mind that their employees’ financial security is no longer jeopardized when a new child arrives or a serious illness occurs. And employers who want to go beyond the basic FAMILY Act benefit, would be free to do so, continuing to use a superior benefit package as a recruitment and retention tool.

For the sake of both the business leaders and professionals we teach and the workforces they will direct, it is well past time for a national paid leave policy. Our businesses and our people will thrive. Legislation such as the FAMILY Act would help people to care for themselves and their loved ones while promoting workplace climates that are supportive and respectful. The nation cannot afford to wait.

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**Signatories to this letter are expressing their personal views and make no representations about the views of the institutions with which they are affiliated.*

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