

FMLA

The President and Expansion of the Family Medical Leave Act 1997

April 20, 1997, Speech

Excerpt:

"That's why I want to expand the family and medical leave law, to give people a little time off every year to go to regular doctor's appointments with their children and with their parents if they're sick or to go to regular parent-teachers conferences at the school. We've got to have the parents if we're going to improve the quality of education, and I think it will be a good thing to do."

April 12, 1997, Radio Address

Good morning. Today I want to talk about the toughest job any person can have. It's not a job you can quit, show up late for, or do just enough to get by. In every way, it's a lifetime commitment: It's being a parent.

In our times, parenting has become an even greater challenge. The world moves faster, and parents rightly worry more about how to protect their children's health, their safety, and their future. Jobs place more demands on mothers and fathers. Finding a balance between home and work takes more effort than ever.

Parents can use some help. And while Government doesn't raise children, it can sometimes give parents the tools they need to make their jobs easier.

That's why we fought for and won the V-chip and a ratings system for TV, so parents can better protect their young children from unsuitable shows; that's why we fought to keep the tobacco industry from advertising their products to children; and why we're fighting to keep streets safer and to reduce juvenile crime. All these help parents to do a better job with their children.

But there is still work to be done. Parents want to do the right thing by their children from the very start. And giving our youngest children what they need to thrive from the very first days of life is something the First Lady has studied for a long time. In her book, "It Takes a Village," Hillary called on our Nation to give its attention to new findings about the early years of children's lives that so often are overlooked in intellectual, social, and emotional development.

Our administration has worked hard to better understand these early years. Since 1993, we increased funding for children's research at the National Institutes of Health by 25 percent, or \$ 322 million, and my balanced budget plan promotes further increases in funding. We've expanded and improved Head Start, and we created an Early Head Start program for children age 3 or younger so that they could get the stimulation they need at those critical times.

From our research, we know that from the very first days of life a child is developing emotionally and intellectually, and how he or she does in those first 3 years of life will help to determine how a child does later in school and in life. That's why we need to begin teaching and nurturing our children before they go to school.

We want to sort through our research and get it to parents and to caregivers who work with children. So next week Hillary and I will bring together researchers, parents, and other experts for the White House Conference on Early Childhood Development and Learning: What New Research on the Brain Tells Us About Our Youngest Children.

We will meet for a full day at the White House, with satellite hookups to 60 more sites around our Nation. This conference is an exciting and an enormous undertaking. It is a call to action to parents, to businesses, to caregivers, the media, the faith community, and the Government, each to do their part to enhance the earliest years of life. It grows out of our commitment to find new ways to support parents and to help their children reach their God-given potential.

As part of that commitment, I also want to call today on the Members of Congress to do their part to come to the aid of our families. They can do that very simply by passing my expansion of the Family and Medical Leave Act.

This bill would allow workers up to 24 hours of unpaid leave each year to fulfill certain family obligations. It could allow a worker to attend a parent-teacher conference or to take a child to the pediatrician or to find quality child care or to care for an elderly relative.

Families occasionally need these small pieces of time to take care of their own. More than 12 million American workers have taken leave for reasons covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act since it became the very first bill I signed into law in 1993. It was needed then, it's needed now, and we need to improve on it. So I urge Congress to act soon on this legislation. Don't ask people to choose, ever, between being good workers and good parents. We can help them to do both. Pass the expanded family and medical leave act.

I believe this bill is so important that today I am asking all Federal departments and agencies to make expanded family and medical leave available to their workers immediately. Wherever possible, I want workers to have access right now to essential time off for family obligations.

I am committed to doing all we can to support families as they struggle to do right by their children. We know that the very earliest years will decide whether children grow up to become healthy and happy people. That's why we're giving parents time off to care for them,

why we should extend the family leave law so millions more parents can have that opportunity, and why we must focus all our science, education, and public efforts to give our children the very best start in life.

Almost a century and a half ago, Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "A child's education should begin at least a hundred years before he was born." What we do now can benefit generations of Americans to come. We can start with the smallest community, the family. And from there we can rebuild and renew the best in America by beginning with the best of America, our children.

Thanks for listening.

April 11, 1997, Memorandum on Expanded Family and Medical Leave Policies - To the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

Subject: Expanded Family and Medical Leave Policies

I have strongly supported meeting Federal employees' family and medical leave needs through enactment of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) and the Federal Employees Family Friendly Leave Act of 1994 (FEFFLA). However, Federal employees often have important family and medical needs that do not qualify for unpaid leave under the FMLA or sick leave under the FEFFLA. I ask you to take immediate action to assist Federal workers further in balancing the demands of work and family.

Last year I proposed to expand the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. My legislation would allow Federal and eligible private sector workers 24 hours of unpaid leave during any 12-month period to fulfill certain family obligations. Under the legislation, employees could use unpaid leave to participate in school activities directly related to the educational advancement of a child, including early childhood education activities; accompany children to routine medical and dental examinations; and tend to the needs of older relatives.

In furtherance of my proposed policy, I ask that you take immediate action within existing statutory authorities to ensure that Federal employees may schedule and be granted up to 24 hours of leave without pay each year for the following activities:

(1) School and Early Childhood Educational Activities -- to allow employees to participate in school activities directly related to the educational advancement of a child. This would include parent-teacher conferences or meetings with child-care providers, interviewing for a new school or child-care facility, or participating in volunteer activities supporting the child's educational advancement. In this memorandum, "school" refers to an elementary school, secondary school, Head Start program, or a child-care facility.

(2) Routine Family Medical Purposes -- to allow parents to accompany children to routine medical or dental appointments, such as annual checkups or vaccinations. Although these activities are not currently covered by the FMLA, the FEFFLA does permit employees to use up to 13 days of sick leave each year for such purposes. Agencies should assure that employees are able to use up to 24 hours of leave without pay each year for these purposes in cases when no additional sick leave is available to employees.

(3) Elderly Relatives' Health or Care Needs -- to allow employees to accompany an elderly relative to routine medical or dental appointments or other professional services related to the care of the elderly relative, such as making arrangements for housing, meals, phones, banking services, and other similar activities. Although Federal employees can use unpaid leave or sick leave for certain of these activities under the FMLA or FEFFLA, such as caring for a parent with a serious health condition, agencies should ensure employees can use up to 24 hours of unpaid time off each year for this broader range of activities related to elderly relatives' health or care needs.

This new policy will assure that Federal employees can schedule and receive up to 24 hours away from the job each year for these family and medical circumstances. I also urge you to accommodate these employee needs as mission requirements permit, even when it is not possible for employees to anticipate or schedule leave in advance for these purposes. In addition, I ask that you support employees' requests to schedule paid time off -- such as annual leave, compensatory time off, and credit hours under flexible work schedules -- for these family activities when such leave is available to these employees. The Office of Personnel Management shall provide guidance to you on the implementation of this memorandum.

I encourage you to use a partnership approach with your employees and their representatives in developing an effective program that balances the employees' needs to succeed both at work and at home. I ask agencies, unions, and management associations to continue to work together to assess and improve the use of family-friendly programs and to make certain that employees are aware of the expanded family and medical leave policy.

William J. Clinton

March 22, 1997, Speech to Women's Leadership Group

Excerpt

"With new pressures on families in the way they work and live, we have to do even more to give people the chance to be good workers and good parents. That's why I proposed expanding the Family and Medical Leave Act so that workers can take time off to attend teacher conferences or to take a child for a medical checkup. I have challenged the Congress to pass legislation that will do just that this year, and I have high hopes that they will."

February 4, 1997, State of the Union

Excerpt:

"To prepare America for the 21st century, we must build stronger families. Over the past 4 years, the family and medical leave law has helped millions of Americans to take time off to be with their families. With new pressures on people in the way they work and live, I believe we must expand family leave so that workers can take time off for teacher conferences and a child's medical checkup. We should pass flex-time, so workers can choose to be paid for overtime in income or trade it in for time off to be with their families."