

FLORIDA FAMILIES NEED PAID FAMILY LEAVE

Right now only 17% of working people in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employer. [1] And although the current Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) allows some employees to take up to 12 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave, it only covers about 60 percent of employees. Further, many people who are eligible to take FMLA can't afford to take it, because FMLA's unpaid. This lack of paid, job-protected leave is why 1 in 4 new mothers is back at work within 10 days of having a baby [2] and also why 1 in 5 retirees leaves the workforce earlier than planned because they need time away from work to care for a spouse or loved one. [3]

Working families need and deserve a robust detail-driven paid family and medical leave policy. We need a plan that is accessible to all working people, inclusive when it comes defining family, affordable and cost-effective and sustainable for workers, employers, and taxpayers and provides a meaningful length of leave. ***Please read the following stories from Florida and take them to heart. Our families are counting on you.**

Anne, Delray Beach

My family is a prime example of those who desperately need paid family leave. My daughter is my primary caregiver and is taking a significant amount of unpaid time off from her professional life to assist me with my daily activities as I recover from a serious illness.

Elizabeth, Tallahassee

Several years ago, when my Vietnam Veteran husband was recovering from amputation of his right leg due to Agent

Orange exposure, and was off work for 6 months. I had to go back to work to help support the family because we were not eligible for paid medical leave. I daily had to leave him to care for himself and our 4 year old daughter, so I could go off to work. In addition to him getting used to limited mobility and relearning skills of daily living, he also had to care for a very young child, despite being on significant pain medication. Don't put other families in this position.

Melanie, Sarasota

As a first time mom, I have first hand experience. The first few months to first year of my daughter's life is so crucial to development; physical, mental, social, you name it. Having to pump for the next 9 mos so that my daughter can get the best for her is a small sacrifice, but I shouldn't have to make that sacrifice. If more of my time off was paid, I would have been able to stay at home without having to worry about money.

Jody, Pompano Beach

As a graduate student I had no such protection or option for medical leave. I was told that there were no leaves of absence and that if I did not return to work as a TA in my field ecology course I would lose my scholarship and position. There was no way I could continue my education without the tuition waiver and small stipend I received as a graduate teaching assistant. So two weeks after a C-Section I was back in the field and in the classroom - that is not a position anyone should be placed in. We need a medical leave option for ALL in need!



**Working families in the United States
LOSE AT LEAST \$20.6 BILLION
IN WAGES EVERY YEAR
due to a lack of access to
paid family and medical leave**

Source: Sarah Jane Glynn and Danielle Corley, "The Cost of Work-Family Policy Inaction: Quantifying the Costs Families Currently Face as a Result of Lacking U.S. Work-Family Policies" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2016), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2016/09/22/143877/the-cost-of-inaction/> .)

Join the conversation on Twitter: @MomsRising would love to hear your hopes and plan for #Paid-FamilyLeave. For more stories from your state visit www.MomsRising.org

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[1] <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/workplace/paid-leave.html> [2] *In These Times: The Real War on Families*
[3] *Keeping Up with the Times: Supporting Family Caregivers with Workplace Leave Policies*, AARP Public Policy Institute

Alex, Key West

As the primary income for my household and an executive at a small company in Key West, FL I was faced with a peculiar circumstance at the birth of my son. Our small company does not qualify for any Federal or State family leave policies as a company with less than 50 employees.

My family cannot pay our monthly bills to live without my income, as my husband works as an independent contractor and has no benefits (like many Key West locals.) Not to mention there are no licensed childcare options for children under 18 months in Key West.

My husband was forced to change jobs so he could have a more flexible schedule to provide childcare for our son, and I was unable to take a maternity leave appropriate for a first time new mother. I was back at work before I could even comfortably use the restroom due to my vaginal birth injuries.

I spent my first weeks back at work hiding from my team as my body had not yet healed (or even close to healed!) and spent the first year using my breastpump in an unairconditioned bathroom 2 times per day, the only restroom shared by 13 employees, and taking phone calls while pumping due to the schedule of my work environment in order to remain productive and valuable. And I am one of the lucky ones with a supportive team and somewhat flexible position in terms of hours.

Mary, Gulf Breeze

As a professional engineer and mother of 2 young children, this bill is very important to me. During my maternity leave, I used a combination of sick days, vacation time, and short term disability. This only partially covered my leave and left my family without our full income during this critical time recovering from childbirth and caring for a newborn.

Not to mention it left me with zero sick and vacation days when I returned to work which was problematic (as if a baby in daycare won't get sick frequently and also share those germs with you). It's time that families should not have to choose between family and a paycheck.

Lisa, Sarasota

I was fortunate to have short term disability to replace 60% of my income for 4 weeks during my maternity leave, as well as having saved about 2 weeks of my paid time off. It was wrenching to return to work when my baby was only 10 weeks old, but we couldn't afford for me to be off much longer.

You see, my water broke suddenly almost 6 weeks early, I was in labor for 33 hours, and when I went back to work he was developmentally only 5 weeks old. Because he was a premie, I was determined to breastfeed as much as possible, and going back to work meant I was pumping 4x a day. Between the

traumatic birth experience, caring for a premature baby, making sure I added him to my insurance in time, and worrying about my family's finances (like meeting our deductible for a week in the NICU), I was really in no mental or emotional shape to go back to work.

Lucky for me, my boss was glad to have me back even though I was a mess! The stress was horrible, and I dream of having a program like Canada's 1 year paid leave and no insurance hurdles to jump through. I hope we get there, one step at a time!

Christie, Defuniak Springs

I quit my job so that I could give birth and take care of our baby. My husband continued working as long as possible because he didn't get paid family leave (he doesn't get sick days either). The birth went disastrously wrong and my daughter and I both almost died.

Still exhausted and bewildered from being in labour for days, getting no sleep and eating little, and then suffering through a birth from a horror movie complete with what is known as birth rape, I needed help taking care of a newborn, especially as my experience with babies was pretty limited. We were sent home that same night with no chance to rest.

At first it seemed all of the danger was over, and he went back to work, but within a few days our daughter stopped eating and then stopped waking up. She had bad jaundice and I thought I was going to lose her. She got better in the hospital under the blue light, but not being able to hold her and having to stay awake to keep the shade over her eyes while she tore it right back off wore me down even more. When we were finally able to take her home my mental illness, which had had to go untreated during my pregnancy, really kicked in and I couldn't keep food down.

I became afraid of taking care of my baby, afraid that I would do something wrong that would kill her. I still cared for her but I finally was so weak that I had to have help. My husband had to use up most of the rest of his vacation days to stay with me until I was stable enough to keep going on my own. That meant that later in the year, when I was so sick from a virus that I could barely move, he had to go on in to work and I had to try to take care of our baby by myself anyway. It meant that when he got sick he had to keep working, spreading germs to everyone there.

Basically, the lack of paid leave made our first year as parents much more stressful and sometimes even traumatic. It makes a difference to every family. The constant fear of losing one's job over an illness or pregnancy is always there. And there is the problem of how to survive if you take an unpaid leave, especially if it is coupled with medical bills or unexpected travel expenses. It is high time that families are given a safety net to help them through their times of crisis – and their times of joy.