NEW HAMPSHIRE
SPEAKS OUT ON THE NEED FOR
PAID FAMILY AND
MEDICAL LEAVE

MomsRising.org
MamásConPoder.org
Dear Fellow Citizen,

We have some work to do in New Hampshire. Although 80 percent of people in NH support Paid Family and Medical Leave,[1] almost half of New Hampshire workers have jobs without paid leave to tend to their own illness; half lack access to parental leave; and two-thirds lack access to paid leave to care for an ill family member. [2] In fact, the US is only one of the only countries worldwide that doesn’t guarantee paid leave after the birth of a child. [3] That lack of paid family and medical leave insurance is hurting New Hampshire families, businesses, and our state’s economy.

Paid Family Medical Leave Insurance would provide a critical safety net for workers and their families, help keep small businesses competitive, and strengthen our local economy by enabling workers to take job-protected Paid Family and Medical Leave in order to care for a family member in the event of the birth, adoption or fostering of a child, to take care of their own serious health condition or to assist with the needs of a family member, such as an aging parent. [4] It’s time to bring Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance to New Hampshire!

Studies show that paid family leave after the birth of a child combats poverty, gives children a healthy start, lowers infant mortality by more than 20% and helps lower the wage gap between women and men. [5,6] At the same time, it can benefit businesses’ bottom line by increasing employee retention and satisfaction. This saves everyone – from parents to taxpayers to businesses – money in the long run. [7]

There is a great deal of research-based evidence on the benefits of paid family leave insurance for families. We also have the stories from New Hampshire families from across the state. Stories from the front lines of families who struggle to make ends meet because they are unable to access paid family and medical leave. Their personal stories cry out for something to be done. The stories included in this booklet are at once heartbreaking, infuriating and inspiring. Story after story demonstrates that paid family and medical leave policies can support New Hampshire families, businesses and our state’s economy.

I urge you to read these stories and join MomsRising in our work to ensure that New Hampshire is the next state to implement paid family and medical leave for all New Hampshire’s workers.

Sincerely,

Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner

Executive Director, MomsRising.org

I am eight months pregnant and I still have no idea what my maternity leave will look like. I work for a small company that is not covered by FMLA. I am the first employee to become pregnant EVER. The employee handbook lists 12 weeks unpaid leave, but as a single mom with a four year old, I cannot afford any time off. My employers have told me that they value me but do not want to set a precedent so they will work this out with me individually. I still have no idea what that means. I have saved my PTO where I could, and apparently they will give me my annual bonus early to help cover my leave. The problem is I do not know how much this bonus will be or when they will pay it. I have tried to explain that I need to plan, with my other living expenses and day care costs for my other child, I am panicked.

– Alyssah, Hudson

I am a small business owner. I have no paid leave, nor can I offer any to my two employees one of which is my wife. When I am not working there is no money coming in. I recently faced the illness and death of my father and I had to manage my schedule to accommodate the support my parents needed for hospital visits and specialists and even at the end I was working from the hospice house. When I decided to become a small business owner I knew what I was taking on, however life for a 25 year old single man is quite different from a 46 year old man raising a family and caring for aging parents. I make my own choices, however the idea of an insurance program that would cover me in these circumstances or in the case of my own illness could give me peace of mind I do not currently have.

– Jason, Salem

I have no access to PFL. My husband and I own our own small business. We had trouble conceiving and were able to manage the massive numbers of appointments necessary to conceive our son and still run our business. Due to lots of planning we were able to get through. We were truly tested when I learned very early in my pregnancy that I would need to be on complete bedrest. We struggled daily trying to keep up with the demands of our company, keeping our clients happy and at the same time not knowing if I would make it through this pregnancy. Luckily our family and business was able to survive, but I kept thinking to myself that this simply should not be this difficult.

– Aiyme, Salem

I have two children, 16 and 14 – and I was lucky enough to have 12 weeks of paid family leave with both of my girls. The company I worked for at the time was ahead of the curve, and I am grateful for the paid time off to bond with my children and start to understand motherhood.

– Lynn, Bedford

I manage a small non profit, our staff is overwhelmingly female and overwhelmingly under 40. We are currently unable to offer any paid leave to our employees other than their paid sick and paid vacation. We offer an optional policy for our employees to

purchase that can cover a leave, but with low salaries many struggle with the additional expense. I want to be able to do more for my employees but I cannot – a paid family leave program would level the playing field for employers and employees.

– Jessica, Salem

Early in my professional career, I was overwhelmed with the intensity of the workplace, and the reality of living on my own. I was working all the time, and my take home pay was barely covering my rent, food, and gas and my student loan was pushing me over the edge. I slipped into a depression. I felt that I was failing on all fronts, I used up all of my PTO, and the more I tried to cope on my own, the deeper I fell.

Recognizing that this was not working. I went to my employer of 7 months and asked for an unpaid leave – fully expecting them to deny it and worried I would lose my job. This did not happen. They guided me through the process to get temporary disability and I was able to receive some pay while I worked through my illness. A month later I returned to work and I spent 5 years working for this company. They were there for me when I needed help and as I dealt with my depression I was assured in knowing that I had a job to return to made my recovery so much easier. I had a great employer and for me it made all the difference.

– Kayleigh, Manchester

My husband and I adopted our younger child in 2009. The day we returned home with our baby, my aging father fell and dislocated his shoulder and broke his collarbone. I spent much of my parental leave rushing to NY and back to care for my Dad and to put a longer-term care plan in place for him.

When my parental leave was about to expire, I asked if I could return to work 3 days per week, which would be temporary until my father’s situation stabilized and until the baby was a little older. My request was dismissed out of hand. My manager did not want to discuss it or to negotiate to 4 days per week. He just said no. So I had to quit my job. My family needed me. My father died less than 3 months later. So this clearly would have been temporary. I am grateful for the time I had with my family but we are still climbing out of the financial hole this put us in.

– Anonymous, Portsmouth

Just food for thought- recently my mom was hospitalized because of a stroke. She has a brain tumor that needed to be looked after and will eventually be removed. I needed to take time off of work to care for her, but I am pregnant and trying to save up vacation time and sick time to use as maternity leave. I was forced to use vacation time and cut into what will be used as my maternity leave.

Without paid family and medical leave, many folks in my generation will be forced to leave the workforce or face financial strain while they care for their parents and/or their children. The lack of this policy makes New Hampshire a less attractive place for young and aging families alike.

– MacKenzie, Dover

We have these ‘family values’ benefits in England & I had my children there & it makes all the difference to early childhood development, health & security – for life!

– Penelope, Portsmouth

Nobody should have to choose between a paycheck and taking care of a sick child. Paid family/medical leave brings basic fairness to the workplace and gives all kids the chance to grow up safe and healthy.

– Sarah, Concord

When my second son was born, I hadn’t accrued enough vacation days to allow for a 12-week paid maternity leave. My husband’s salary couldn’t support our growing family; missing even a month’s paycheck would have made it impossible to pay even our most urgent bills. So, I spent the weeks before an after his birth negotiating with my employer, trying to find a way to care for my baby while maintaining my paycheck. This was emotionally draining at a time when I most needed my mental resources. Luckily for me, everything worked out in the end, but luck should have nothing to do with it.

– Heather, Derry
When I had my baby I was not going to let anything interfere with her (and me) getting the health and emotional benefits of breastfeeding. Pumping at work eliminates the emotional benefits, plus it would be mostly impossible at my job. I had to quit. There will always be jobs but there will not always be a baby who needs me.

Fast forward a few years and I am working part time, we entered the Home Affordable Modification program to avoid foreclosure, we have compiled large credit card debt, family members have bailed us out at times, and we are still scraping by.

My daughter will not be going to preschool with her peers because we cannot afford it. Paid Family Leave would have allowed me to start off with income and keep a job to return to. That would have us in a very different position today.

– Janine, Milford

My daughter had a difficult time breastfeeding at first. I spent the first month of her life with recurrent mastitis and painful, bleeding nipples. Finally, when she was four weeks old we discovered she was tongue-tied and had it remedied.

Still, it took several weeks more for her to learn to nurse properly and comfortably. If I had not been able to take an extended maternity leave, I probably would not have been able to continue breastfeeding.

This would have been detrimental to her health and to my feelings of success as a mother.

– Esther, Sanbornton

My story has a happy ending, despite the fact that FMLA does not apply to any business that employs less than 50 people in NH. My employer is a family man who owns his family’s business.

Even though he was under no obligation to offer me Maternity Leave, he generously gave me the full 12 weeks.... unpaid, but 12 weeks a guarantee that my job would be in place when and if I wished to return.

For that and many other reasons I will be forever grateful. He was also kind enough to give me a ‘bonus’ to help defray some of the lost income. It wasn’t as much as I would have earned while working, but it was a lifesaver. He was not required to do any of this under the law.

I have no complaints as my boss went over and above what NH requires for maternity leave (which is next to nothing). I was able to bond and establish a strong breastfeeding relationship with my baby due to the time I was allowed. My only complaint is WHY are there so few paid and unpaid provisions made for new mothers and fathers at the NH State level?

I appreciated EVERY day of the 12 weeks I received as I don’t think I opened my eyes until week 6. This was a time in which some of my fellow moms were required to report back to work.

– Rhonda, Manchester

Two weeks of Paternity leave made all the difference in my recovery & building in his relationship with his children when our 3 children were born. This helps get families off to a healthy start.

– Laura, Salem

The hardest time in any woman’s life is the 12 weeks after a child is born. I had no idea until it was me. God bless all the women who give to the end of their energy, but please let us give them the justice they deserve with paid leave.

- Marie, Keene

I very much hope this is being seriously considered. It is a very important health issue in our country. It’s not ideal, but it’s a start.

- Rachel, Litchfield

As a person who wants to start a family in the coming years, this issue is something I agonize about. Should I keep working and have to leave my newborn sooner than I want to/should or risk financially effecting my family by leaving my job and staying home with my kids until they are older.

If significant maternity leave was available (and if childcare costs were lower), then I wouldn't need to decide. I could better be a mom and an employee. Instead I feel like I need to choose one or the other. Either way, less money for my family to live on.

- HollyAnn, Newport

As a new mom, I think it’s embarrassing that the U.S., a world leader in so many other ways, does not protect the very reason why our country has so much potential: our children. We have to step up among world leaders and take responsibility for our babies! All statistics point to an increase in moms’ and babies’ health when moms can stay home with little ones and not worry about losing their jobs as a result.

- Suzanne, Claremont

I’m lucky enough to work for a company that gives three months of paid leave for mothers in the US. But it shouldn’t be a matter of luck!

- Bill, Bradford

My son has cancer, for the 2nd time. At this time he is not undergoing treatment; however he asked me to apply for FMLA so when he begins his treatment again I will be available to help. I was told I am not eligible because he doesn’t live in my house. He doesn't want his wife to be the sole person assisting him as her father passed away from cancer. Now I will have to use my vacation time to help him out & this will most definitely NOT be a vacation. These laws need to be re-vamped so we can be there for our families when they need us.

- Kristine, Laconia

I’ll be heading out soon to have our second and it stresses me to see how stressed my husband is to know he’ll be the only one bringing in income for a while.

- Korin, Bradford

As a mother, child development expert and teacher I definitely see the positive impact on children when families get paid leave. Having a defined leave option for all families would be beneficial for everyone.

- Mary, Chester

As a certified postpartum doula and lactation counselor, I see first hand how important it is for mothers to have time off of work to bond with their infants and begin solid breastfeeding relationships.

Unfortunately, so many moms are stressed out about money and concerned about returning to work, that they never have a chance to just enjoy learning about their baby and their new role as a parent. Paid leave would alleviate so many concerns for parents and absolutely help with breastfeeding rates!

- Krystal, Hampton

MomsRising.org is an online and on-the-ground grassroots organization of more than a million people who are working to achieve economic security for all families in the United States.

MomsRising is working for paid family leave, flexible work options, affordable childcare, and for an end to the wage and hiring discrimination which penalizes so many others. MomsRising also advocates for better childhood nutrition, health care for all, toxic-free environments, and breastfeeding rights so that all children can have a healthy start.

Established in 2006, MomsRising and its members are organizing and speaking out to improve public policy and to change the national dialogue on issues that are critically important to America’s families. In 2013, Forbes.com named MomsRising's web site as one of the Top 100 Websites For Women for the fourth year in a row and Working Mother magazine included MomsRising on its “Best of the Net” list.