

Washington Work and Family Coalition

Working together for working families



A new baby, a cancer diagnosis, or an ailing parent — at some point in their life, everyone needs to take time away from work to care for themselves or a loved one. But few employers can prepare for unexpected life events and afford their employees taking extended paid time off entirely on their own.

Paid family and medical leave would be easy and affordable for workers and business owners, and similar policies are already working in California, New Jersey and Rhode Island — across all sectors, in companies large and small — providing predictability and peace of mind for employers and employees.

How would Washington's paid family and medical leave program work and what would it cost?

Both employees and employers would contribute to paid family and medical leave premiums, which would be collected by the Employment Security Department, just like unemployment insurance premiums are currently.

July 2018: The program would begin phasing in with a 0.225 percent payroll premium, split by employers and employees. That would mean a typical Washington worker working full time and her employer would both pay about \$1 a week. For a business with an annual payroll of \$250,000, it would cost a little over \$6 a week.

January 2020: the premium would increase to the full .51 percent, still split by employers and employees. For about \$2 a week, workers would have access to extended paid leave to take care of themselves and their families and business owners would have an easy and affordable way to cover the costs.

How much leave could an employee take and how much of their wages could they claim?

The type of leave an employee could take and the circumstances it would require are prescribed and clear, so a business owner wouldn't have to decide if a worker's needs qualified.

Beginning in 2019, an employee could take up to 26 weeks of **family leave**, which includes caring for a newborn or newly-adopted child or a family member with a serious health condition.

Beginning in 2020, an employee could take up to 12 weeks of **medical leave**, which can only be used for the employee's own serious health condition.

The benefits for employees are progressive, based on weekly wages, and top off at \$1,000 per week. For example, someone earning **\$500 per week** would get a weekly benefit of **90 percent**; someone with earnings of **\$1,000 per week** would get **72 percent**; and someone with earnings of **\$2,000 per week** would be able to claim **50 percent**.

How would paid family and medical leave coordinate with other leave policies?

Paid family and medical leave in Washington would use already-existing definitions for qualifying medical conditions and job protection, and would not contradict current law.

“Serious health condition” – paid family and medical leave would use the same definition as the unpaid federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Medical professionals already certify FMLA-qualifying conditions. FMLA leave would run concurrently when eligible employees use paid family and medical leave.

“Job protection” – paid family and medical leave would follow the standard for maternity leave protections already in place under the Washington Law Against Discrimination. Companies with 8 or more employees would be required to take an employee back after paid leave, but only if the employee had already worked at least 6 months for the company. As with FMLA, companies could limit job protection for the top 10 percent of salaried employees.

Additionally, employer-provided paid leave could be coordinated as employers choose. For example, by “topping-off” benefits for employees, or allowing employees to use it during the week waiting period for disability leave.

About the Washington Work and Family Coalition

The Washington Work and Family Coalition is a partnership of individuals, small business owners, unions, community, faith, senior, and women’s groups and other grassroots organizations working to promote policies for healthy Washington families and a healthy economy. Learn more online at [www. waworkandfamily.org](http://www.waworkandfamily.org) or by emailing marilyn@eoionline.org.