

# Washington Work and Family Coalition

Working together for working families



## Paid Family and Medical Leave is Right for Washington

A new baby, a cancer diagnosis, or an ailing parent — at some point in their life, everyone needs to take extended time away from work to care for themselves or a loved one. But without access to extended paid leave, Washington workers have to put the health of their families aside to keep their jobs.

**Paid family and medical leave** would allow workers to take the time they need for a new child or when a serious health condition strikes. Life is unexpected, but the predictability of paid family and medical leave can help.

### Time for life's emergencies

If a Washington worker gets a cold or has a sick child at home, paid sick leave helps, but there are times when everyone needs to take extended time away from their job to take care of themselves or a loved one. When an unexpected health diagnosis comes along, a new child joins the family, or an aging parent is facing life's end, too many workers have to choose between a paycheck or family and health.

Only 13 percent of private-sector workers — usually high-wage earners — have access to paid family leave nationally.<sup>1</sup> Among the lowest-wage workers — predominantly women and people of color — only 4 percent have access. Federal law provides unpaid leave for these circumstances, but fails to protect nearly half of workers.

### A proven solution

Other states – California, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and New York – have established successful family and disability leave programs that cover workers in companies large and small, from high-wage to minimum-wage workers. Similar to unemployment insurance, these programs are funded through payroll premiums.

Public health experts have found clear links between expanding paid maternity leave and improved outcomes for newborns, including higher rates of breastfeeding, stronger development, and a reduction in infant mortality rates.<sup>2</sup> And paid leave helps close the gender wage gap, too.

### Popular and affordable in Washington

New estimates for Washington show that a program here that provides 12 weeks of medical leave and 26 weeks of family leave would cost a business around \$2 per week in a payroll premium for the typical worker, with an employee match.<sup>3</sup> Benefits would be progressive, replacing 90 percent of usual wages for a low-wage worker and about 70 percent for a mid-range worker, topping off at \$1,000 per week. Given the affordability and positive outcomes, it's no wonder that 3 in 4 Washington voters said they support a paid family and medical leave program for Washington.<sup>4</sup>

## Better health and equity for women, babies, and families

New parents now have to cobble together time to nurture their newborn, using saved-up vacation time and sick leave, and taking unpaid time when that runs out. Despite the high costs of infant childcare and pediatricians' recommendations to breastfeed exclusively for at least six months, one in four U.S. women go back to work within two weeks of childbirth because they can't afford to stay home with their newborns.<sup>5</sup>

Paid family leave also improves maternal health and allows new fathers time to bond, with lasting positive benefits for the child and family. Women in states with paid leave programs are more likely to be working a year following childbirth, less likely to go on public assistance, and earn more than women in other states.<sup>6</sup> Currently, kids born into high-income families get all these advantages from birth, while kids born into low-income families too often start out with the disadvantages of short parental leaves.

Our aging population means that more workers than ever are also caring for parents and other family members – and are more prone to serious illness or injury themselves. Nearly 1 million Washingtonians are providing unpaid care for an adult family member.<sup>7</sup> Paid family leave in Washington would mean adult children could take time to care for parents, in-laws, or grandparents. It could mean the difference between a quick recovery at home or an extended stay in an expensive nursing facility for seniors.

## Predictable for business

Paid family and medical leave provides insurance so the employers don't have to cover the full cost of an employee's leave themselves. That allows smaller companies to better compete, and gives them the flexibility to add hours for other employees or bring on additional help when someone goes out on leave. The cost is low and predictable from year to year – about \$12 per week for a business with an annual payroll of \$250,000. Employees are more likely to come back to work when they are ready to focus and be fully productive, and with peace of mind morale goes up, too.<sup>8</sup>

A Washington paid family and medical leave program will lift up workers, businesses, and seniors, and help build thriving and healthy communities for us all.

## Proposed phase-in schedule:

July 2018	October 2019	January 2020	October 2020
Half premium collection begins	Family leave benefits begin	Full premium collection begins	Disability benefits begin

## 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](mailto:marilyn@eoionline.org).

- 1 "Leave benefits: Access, private industry workers." Bureau of Labor Statistics Employee Benefits Survey. March 2016.
- 2 "Population Health and Paid Parental Leave: What the United States Can Learn from Two Decades of Research." Department of Health Services, School of Public Health, University of Washington. Published in Healthcare, June 2016.
- 3 "Cost, Leave and Length Estimates ... for Washington." Randy Albelda and Alan Clayton-Matthews. July 2016.
- 4 "Washington Paid Leave: Findings from a Survey of 529 Registered Voters Statewide." Lake Research Partners. March 2016.
- 5 Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey data. Economic Opportunity Institute. September 2016.
- 6 "The Effects of California's Paid Family Leave Program on Mothers' Leave-Taking and Subsequent Labor Market Outcomes." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 17715. December 2011.
- 7 "The Growing Contributions and Costs of Family Caregiving." AARP Public Policy Institute. 2011.
- 8 "Policy Matters: Public Policy, Paid Leave for Parents, and Economic Security for U.S. Workers." Center for Women and Work, Rutgers. April 2012."