

Senator Kelly & Representative Backer,

I received NO paid maternity option at all when I had my twin babies. I worked for a nonprofit agency (a women's empowerment agency, ironically) which had fewer than 50 employees, so they were not even required to provide short term disability. The only thing I was offered was to have a job when I returned, as required by FMLA.

Knowing I was going to be unpaid for maternity leave, we saved all we could for months leading up to the birth. Prior to leaving, as well as during leave, we lived frugally spending very limited amounts on anything that wasn't necessary. We attempted to reduce our household budget in any way we could, which included deferment and forbearance for both my husband and my student loans which will result in higher payments later. We were forced to put groceries and gas on cards when our funds fell short a few months.

Since we were income-eligible, I went on WIC for myself and my twins to help with some grocery costs, as well as formula supplements (My twins were both breastfed and formula-fed for the first 10 months, until they self-weaned and had formula for the last 2 months until milk at 1 years of age). Both my husband and I are both college educated. I have a master's degree and my husband has a bachelor's. We fall outside the scope of the population most likely to use assistance programs like WIC. We envisioned more opportunities for success, but supporting our growing family proved more difficult than we expected.

My husband had to work any overtime he could, often working 6 days a week, 10-12 hours a day- leaving me at home with twin infants (lots of work, if anyone doesn't already imagine) and some days he didn't get to see the babies at all because he left before they woke and arrived home after bedtime. We had to use all of our savings, and since I had a nonprofit job and my husband a blue collar job, we do not have a large income/savings to speak of in the first place. As a result of no maternity leave we are left with increased credit card debt and no savings. And this, all at the time we are starting a family.

I hope you will support paid family & medical leave – it would have helped my family in so many ways so we didn't have to struggle like we did (and still are).

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Lello Bennett
Stratford, CT