

Ellen Bravo, Executive Director of Family Values @ Work  
Testimony for Connecticut Labor and Public Employees Committee  
Hearing on SB 221: An Act Concerning Paid Family and Medical Leave  
March 8, 2016

[www.familyvaluesatwork](http://www.familyvaluesatwork.org), [bravo@familyvaluesatwork.org](mailto:bravo@familyvaluesatwork.org)

My name is Ellen Bravo, and I have been working for years to advance policies that value families at work, first as director of 9to5, National Association of Working Women, and for more than a decade as director of Family Values @ Work Consortium. In 1995 I was appointed by Congress to the bipartisan Commission on Leave to study the impact of the Family and Medical Leave Act on employers and employees. I have written several books and numerous articles on working women and testified before federal, state and local legislative bodies. For a number of years I taught a masters level class on Family-Friendly Workplace Practices at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Family Values @ Work is a network of coalitions in 24 states that bring together a wide range of local groups -- working women and men, restaurant owners and restaurant workers, feminists and faith leaders, those who want to end poverty and end asthma, advocates for workers, children, seniors and racial justice, LGBT activists and public health professionals, and many business owners. Together, we have been making strides toward establishing economic security for families through paid sick days and paid family leave policies.

While many employers already offer the policies we seek, millions of workers are still operating in workplaces designed for men with wives at home full time.

In 2010, nearly three quarters of children had both parents or their only parent working, a 13 percent increase since the mid-1980's when FMLA was first drafted.<sup>1</sup> Women are the primary or co-breadwinners for nearly two-thirds of the nation's families, so a woman's income loss during maternity leave or even a few days with a sick child has significant economic consequences for her family.<sup>2</sup>

Not having these policies in place also holds back our economy. For stronger families, stronger businesses, a stronger country, we must make sure that working women have opportunities to succeed as providers *and* as caregivers. Policies like family and medical leave insurance are small steps that can create a big difference in making us the nation we set out to be.

Families in this country will not have real economic security until their earnings and their jobs are protected when they or a family member needs care. The lack of modest policies like those

---

<sup>1</sup> Houser, L. and Vartanian, T. (January 2012). "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public," retrieved May 15, 2014 from <http://smlr.rutgers.edu/paymatters-cwwreport-january2012>

<sup>2</sup> Boushey, H. (2009). The New Breadwinners. In H. Boushey and A. O'Leary (Eds.), The Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation Changes Everything. Retrieved May 15 2013 from <http://shriverreport.org/special-report/a-womans-nation-changes-everything/>

that exist in the rest of the world forces people to make an impossible choice between the jobs they need and the family that needs them. This goes against the core family values that our country believes in – across party lines and geographies.

Twenty-three years ago, Congress passed the Family and Medical Leave Act with bipartisan support. The FMLA provides up to 12 weeks unpaid time for the occasional longer term leave people need to care for a new baby or for a serious personal or family illness. It applies to those who work in a firm of 50 or more, have been on the job at least a year and work at least 25 hours a week on average for the same employer.

FMLA was a great first step for families – but as our economy and our families have changed, so too must our laws. The FMLA leaves out 40 percent of the workforce.<sup>3</sup> It does not include routine illness or preventive care. And it has a narrow definition of family. Above all, many of those who are covered are unable to take the time they need because it is unpaid. In 2012, two and a half times as many people as in 2000 needed leave and were eligible but didn't take it, mostly because they couldn't afford it. Many others went back from leave too early, without fully recovering.<sup>4</sup>

**Family and medical leave insurance is a common sense solution to the dilemma our nation faces: the very thing that makes us good parents or children to our parents often jeopardizes our ability to make ends meet.**

### **States are Leading the Way**

My children and I were part of helping to win unpaid Family and Medical Leave in Wisconsin in 1988. That win, along with similar ones in many other states, paved the way for the national bill in 1993. The state policies helped disprove the predictions of job loss and business closings – family leave in fact strengthened families and businesses by helping people keep their jobs and their earnings. It lowers turnover costs, boosts productivity and morale.

The 1995 Commission on Leave I sat on unanimously recommended that states “consider voluntarily establishing or expanding existing temporary disability insurance programs to provide wage replacement for periods of family and medical leave.”<sup>5</sup>

Research conducted for that Commission showed how difficult it was for people to take leave that was unpaid. We found that nearly one in ten (9 percent) of leave-takers had to rely on public assistance to support themselves while on leave. That number was more than one in five (20.9 percent) for those earning \$20,000 or less.<sup>6</sup> The overall figure increased in the most

---

<sup>3</sup> Klerman, J. et al, (updated September 2013). “Family and Medical Leave in 2012, Technical Report,” Abt Associates, Inc., <http://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/fmla/FMLA-2012-Technical-Report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> A Workable Balance: Report to Congress on Family and Medical Leave Policies, Department of Labor, 1996 <https://archive.org/stream/workablebalancer00unit#page/198/mode/2up/search/Policy+Directions>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

recent survey (9.8 percent).<sup>7</sup> Sixty percent of workers without fully paid leave in 2012 reported difficulty making ends meet and many said they put off paying bills, drew down savings and cut their leave short. An even greater number, 84 percent, said they put off spending. As the Department of Labor pointed out in its pivotal study, “The Cost of Doing Nothing,” that signals “not just hardship for families, but also lost income to local stores and landlords when families delay fixing the car or paying the rent.”<sup>8</sup>

In 2002, California became the first state to attempt to make family leave affordable. Implemented in 2004, the new law expanded the state’s existing temporary disability insurance program – just as the Commission had recommended – to help ensure working families had income to rely on during family leave. New Jersey followed in 2009. In 2013, Rhode Island became the third state to pass such a measure.

Together these three states have brought access to family leave insurance programs to more than 17 million people. Legislation is moving in New York State, Massachusetts and DC. Other states are on their way, with Washington having passed and working to appropriate funding to implement the program next year. Bills are pending or being considering in more than a dozen other states.

Economists, business owners and workers alike have confirmed the success of these programs. A comprehensive list of the studies is included in the Appendix to the report recently submitted entitled “Implementing Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Connecticut.”<sup>9</sup>

For example, a Rutgers study shows that New Jersey’s family leave insurance (FLI) program has saved businesses money by improving employee retention, decreasing turnover costs, and improving productivity.<sup>10</sup> Despite “sky is falling” claims about the potential costs of FLI for business, research from *Unfinished Business*, a book on the success of California’s program, shows employers reporting that a neutral or positive effect on employee productivity, profitability, and turnover; most employers coordinate their own benefits with the state’s paid family leave program.<sup>11</sup> Workers who took paid family or medical leave are more likely to

---

<sup>7</sup> Klerman, J. et al, (updated September 2013). “Family and Medical Leave in 2012, Technical Report,” Abt Associates, Inc., <http://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/fmla/FMLA-2012-Technical-Report.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Department of Labor, “The Cost of Doing Nothing,” Sept. 4, 2015, available at <http://www.dol.gov/featured/paidleave/cost-of-doing-nothing-report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Glynn Sarah Jaye, Gayle Goldin et al, “Implementing Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance in Connecticut,” Institute for Women’s policy Research, February 2016. Available at <https://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/FMLI%20report%20for%20CT.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Houser, L and Vartanian, T. (2012 January). “Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public, A Report of the Center for Women and Work.” Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations. Retrieved May 18, 2014 from <http://news.rutgers.edu/news-releases/2012/01/rutgers-study-finds-20120118#.U3Zi9JdXTo>.

<sup>11</sup> Appelbaum, E and Milkman, R. (2011). “Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California.” Center for Economic and Policy Research. Retrieved May 18, 2014 from <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>.

return to the same employer, reducing turnover costs, which can range from nearly \$5,400 to more than \$18,000.<sup>12</sup>

Most employees who used California's paid family leave program reported that leave had a positive effect on their ability to care for a child or ill family member (82.3%), allowed them to initiate breastfeeding (91.3%), had a positive effect on their ability to arrange child care (62.5%) and had a positive effect on an ill family member's health (86.5%).<sup>13</sup>

In New Jersey, women who take paid leave after a child's birth are more likely to be employed the following year and report increased wages than women who don't take leave. Parents who took leave report lower levels of public assistance (about 40 percent less) in the year following their child's birth, when compared to those without paid leave.<sup>14</sup> Met Life conservatively estimates that unpaid caregiving costs women more than \$300,000 over a lifetime.<sup>15</sup>

Another benefit of family and medical leave insurance is that it increases men's role in caregiving by making it possible for them to be involved without the family taking a big financial hit.<sup>16</sup> In California, for example, fathers' leave-taking for bonding with a new child rose 12 percent from 2011 to 2012. In Iceland, where men and women each get 3 months paid leave and can share another 3 months, 90 percent of fathers of newborns take leave – and three years later, 70 percent of those couples share child care responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

Paid family leave also promotes children's wellbeing. Ensuring that new parents can take time to care for a newborn gives babies their best start in life. Four-fifths of respondents who took paid leaves reported they were better able to care for a new baby.<sup>18</sup> New mothers who take paid leave are more likely to take the minimum doctor-recommended six to eight weeks to recover from birth.<sup>19</sup> Newborns whose mothers take 12 weeks of leave are more likely to be breastfed, receive regular check-ups, and get critical immunizations.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Houser, L and Vartanian, T. (2012 January). "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public, A Report of the Center for Women and Work." Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations. Retrieved May 18, 2014 from <http://news.rutgers.edu/news-releases/2012/01/rutgers-study-finds-20120118#.U3ZiJ9JdXTo>.

<sup>15</sup> The Met Life Study of Caregiving Costs to Working Caregivers, June 2011, available at <https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/mmi/publications/studies/2011/Caregiving-Costs-to-Working-Caregivers.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Appelbaum, E and Milkman, R. (2011). "Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California." Center for Economic and Policy Research. Retrieved May 18, 2014 from <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Arnalds, Asdis A., et al. Equal Rights to Paid Parental Leave and Caring Fathers – the Case of Iceland. In *Icelandic Review of Politics and Administration*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (2013). Available at <http://www.irpa.is/article/view/1211>

<sup>18</sup> Appelbaum, E and Milkman, R. (2011). "Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California." Center for Economic and Policy Research. Retrieved May 18, 2014 from <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Gomby, D., & Pei, D. (2009). "Newborn Family Leave: Effects on Children, Parents, and Business." David and Lucile Packard Foundation publication. Retrieved 4 January 2013, from [http://www.packard.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/NFLA\\_fullreport\\_final.pdf](http://www.packard.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/NFLA_fullreport_final.pdf).

An examination of more than two decades of data from 16 European countries showed that paid parental leave policies were associated with lower rates of infant and child mortality.<sup>20</sup> This is especially important in the United States, given that a baby born here is more likely to die before its first birthday than one born in Poland or Slovakia.<sup>21</sup> According to the Centers for Disease Control, we're at the bottom of the list of wealthy countries in this category.

Similarly, such policies can lower rates of maternal mortality. While many countries have seen a decline, the rate in the U.S. has doubled.<sup>22</sup> According to the CDC, African-American women are more than three times as likely to die as a result of pregnancy and childbirth than white women in the United States. Compounding the problem is the fact that nearly one in four pregnant employees in this country return to the job within two weeks of delivery.<sup>23</sup>

Paid family leave promotes the wellbeing and independence of seniors by enabling families to care for aging parents without fear of losing all their wages and allowing seniors to age in their homes instead of state facilities. This also saves taxpayer money.<sup>24</sup> When cared for by family members, patients in the hospital recover from illness and injury faster, leading to shorter hospital stays, improved health outcomes, and decreased health costs.<sup>25</sup>

Businesses support family and medical leave programs and replacement income provided by FMLI goes right back into the local economy, as workers spend it to help cover the basics. According to Herb Greenberg, founder and CEO of Caliper, a human resources consulting firm in New Jersey: "Family Leave Insurance ... has been a huge positive for Caliper. When you think about the cost of individuals leaving, the cost of seeking new employees, the cost of maybe hiring the wrong person, training them, etc., and you compare that to the pennies that Family Leave costs you—there is just no comparison in terms of the pure balance sheet."<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Ruhm, C., "Parent Leave and Child Health," *Journal of Health Economics* 19, no. 6 (2000), 931-60

<sup>21</sup> Ingraham, Christopher, "Our Infant Mortality Rate is a National Embarrassment," *Washington Post*, Sept. 29, 2014. Available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/09/29/our-infant-mortality-rate-is-a-national-embarrassment/>

<sup>22</sup> Wallace, Kelly, "Why is the Maternal Mortality Rate Going Up in the U.S.," *CNN*, Dec. 11, 2015. Available at <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/01/health/maternal-mortality-rate-u-s-increasing-why/>

<sup>23</sup> Lerner, Sharon, "The Real War on Families: Why the U.S. Needs Paid Leave Now," in *In These Times*, August 18, 2015. Available at <http://inthesetimes.com/article/18151/the-real-war-on-families>

<sup>24</sup> Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (2008 April). "Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce." Retrieved May 18 2014 from <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2008/Retooling-for-an-Aging-America-Building-the-Health-Care-Workforce.aspx>.

<sup>25</sup> Taylor, MRH and O'Connor, P. Resident parents and shorter hospital stay, *National Children's Hospital and Department of Paediatrics, Trinity College, Dublin*. Retrieved May 18, 2014 from <http://adc.bmj.com/content/64/2/274.full.pdf+html>.

<sup>26</sup> Family Values @ Work. "From the Story Bank: Dr. Herb Greenberg's Story." <http://familyvaluesatwork.org/story/dr-herb-greenbergs>

A survey for Small Business Majority found that six in 10 New York small business owners support a family and medical leave program with shared contributions from employers and employees.<sup>27</sup>

A growing number of companies has recently expanded their paid leave policies. All of them cite a business case for doing so. As YouTube CEO Susan Wojcicki put it, after Google (parent company of YouTube) increased paid maternity leave from 12 weeks to 18 in 2007, “the rate at which new moms left Google fell by 50%. ... [I]t’s much better for Google’s bottom line—to avoid costly turnover, and to retain the valued expertise, skills and perspective of our employees who are mothers.”<sup>28</sup>

Opponents warn of the unintended consequences of the program you are considering today. But the evidence says otherwise. It’s time to turn the spotlight on the *intended* consequences of such a program listed above and how they align with key priorities of our nation.

One of our leaders in Maryland, Melissa Broome, spent a week at Johns Hopkins Hospital with her four-year-old son, Owen. Both Melissa and her husband had paid time that allowed them to be at his side so they could, as Melissa put it, hold his hand and whisper in his ear every time he was poked and prodded. Fortunately, Owen will be fine. But it broke Melissa’s heart to see how many children were alone during the day. When they took Owen for a walk through the halls in a red wagon, he didn’t ask why so many of the kids were bald. But he did ask, “Where are that boy’s mommy and daddy? ....He shouldn’t be all by himself.”<sup>29</sup> Talking to a parent in the family kitchen one evening, Melissa learned that this woman’s 18-month-old daughter was about to be discharged with a feeding tube. Her day care won’t take children with feeding tubes. “I don’t know how I’m going to be able to keep my job,” she said. “I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

It may be very difficult to cure the diseases that afflict these children. But it is not difficult to institute policies like family and medical leave insurance so that their parents can hold their hands and whisper in their ears.

We thank you for holding this hearing today and hope that you will champion these policies -- not as a favor to women but as a way to strengthen families, businesses and the economy.

---

<sup>27</sup> Small Business Majority (2013 December). “New York Small Businesses Support Publicly Administered Family and Medical Leave Insurance Pools.” Retrieved May 18, 2014 from <http://www.smallbusinessmajority.org/small-business-research/family-medical-leave/121213-NY-FML-report.php>.

<sup>28</sup> Wojcicki, Susan. “Why Paid Leave is Good for Business.” Wall Street Journal, Dec. 16, 2014. Available at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/susan-wojcicki-paid-maternity-leave-is-good-for-business-1418773756>

<sup>29</sup> Melissa Broome, “Choosing Between Your Child and Your Job,” May 16, 2014 Baltimore Sun [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2014-05-16/news/bs-ed-family-leave-20140517\\_1\\_johns-hopkins-children-owen-day-care#.U3jS9jnS6PI.email](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2014-05-16/news/bs-ed-family-leave-20140517_1_johns-hopkins-children-owen-day-care#.U3jS9jnS6PI.email)