



## Balancing Work and Life: Family Friendly Policies

AAUW believes that creating a work environment that helps employees balance the responsibilities of work and family is good public policy. AAUW is committed to, “greater availability of and access to benefits and policies that create a family-friendly workplace environment,” which are critical for women to achieve “equitable access and advancement in employment.”<sup>1</sup> Despite the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and a patchwork of state laws and employer-based benefits, family and personal sick leave remain elusive to many working Americans. And despite the relative wealth of the United States, family-oriented workplace policies in this country lag dramatically behind those in much of the rest of the world, including all high-income countries and many middle- and low-income countries as well.<sup>2</sup>

The past fifty years has seen substantial changes in the composition of the American workforce. Two-thirds (64 percent) of women with children under six are in the labor force.<sup>3</sup> Nationwide, 22.9 million families provide care for an adult family member or friend, and nearly 80 percent of those care recipients are over the age of 50.<sup>4</sup> Unique solutions are necessary to meet the demands of families and the obligations of work.

- **Expanding Family and Medical Leave:** There are important expansions to FMLA that are necessary to support working families. AAUW will work to end the unpaid status of FMLA and expand the number of people able to access FMLA leave. AAUW supports adding job protection for other important family responsibilities within FMLA, such as parent-teacher conferences, accompanying an adult child or ill sibling on a doctor’s visit, as well as to include coverage for victims of domestic violence. AAUW urges the administration to reverse the negative effects of recently-issued regulations, finalized in November 2008, that make it harder for most workers to reap the benefits of FMLA. AAUW further supports the creation of an FMLA public education campaign to ensure workers know their rights and employers know their responsibilities. Finally, the Department of Labor must have the funds it needs to enforce FMLA; the Wage and Hour Administration has been given enforcement responsibilities without the additional resources necessary to vigorously enforce the law.
- **Paid Sick Days for All:** For the 86 million Americans who do not have paid sick days,<sup>5</sup> a decision to stay home to care for a sick child, family member or for themselves could jeopardize their job or family income – an even more difficult situation given the deep economic downturn. Without sick days, employees often come to work ill, decreasing productivity and infecting coworkers. AAUW supports legislation such as the Healthy Families Act, which will provide seven paid sick days for full-time employees and a pro-rated number for part-time employees.
- **Paid Parental Leave for Federal Employees:** Paid parental leave enables working parents to take care of and bond with their newborns and newly-adopted children, which is critical to their children’s health and well-being— without having to worry about their paycheck. As more mothers have entered the paid labor force for their family’s economic security—increasing their labor force participation rate from 47 to 71 percent between 1975 and 2007<sup>6</sup>—access to paid parental leave has become a necessity for today’s working families. This option is also critical for men in order to chip away at stereotypes that place caregiving responsibilities solely on women. AAUW will advocate to ensure that all employees have access to paid parental leave, first working to pass the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act; the measure allows the government to lead the way, in the hopes the private sector will follow with similar policies.
- **Workplace Flexibility:** Traditional scheduling and inflexible practices are detrimental to the balance most employees try to strike; this, in turn, negatively impacts recruitment and retention for employers who have not adapted. AAUW supports flexible work policies that take many forms including job sharing, telecommuting, and career flexibility. Further, policies such as affording employees greater control over their own work schedules, including start and end times; the right to request schedule adjustments and flexible work policies from their employers; and the right to part-time parity in wages, benefits, and government protections, are important improvements for the 111th Congress and the administration to work towards.

For more information, call Lisa Maatz, Director of Public Policy and Government Relations, 202/785-7720, Tracy Sherman, Government Relations Manager, 202/785-7730, or Adam Zimmerman, Regulatory Affairs Manager, 202/728-7617.

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<sup>1</sup> American Association of University Women. (July 2007). *2007 – 09 AAUW Public Policy Program*. Retrieved April 8, 2009, from [http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue\\_advocacy/upload/2007-09-PPP-brochure.pdf](http://www.aauw.org/advocacy/issue_advocacy/upload/2007-09-PPP-brochure.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Hegewisch, Ariane and Janet Gornick. (May 2008). *Statutory Routes to Workplace Flexibility in Cross-National Perspective*. Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved April 8, 2009 from <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B258workplaceflex.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Lowell, Vicky. Institute for Women's Policy Research. (May 2004). *No Time to be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don't Have Paid Sick Leave*. Retrieved April 8, 2009, from <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B242.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP. (April 2004). *Executive Summary*. *Caregiving in the U.S.: Findings From the National Caregiver Survey*. Retrieved April 8, 2009, from <http://www.caregiving.org/data/04execsumm.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Lowell, Vicky. Institute for Women's Policy Research. (May 2004). *No Time to be Sick: Why Everyone Suffers When Workers Don't Have Paid Sick Leave*. Retrieved April 8, 2009, from <http://www.iwpr.org/pdf/B242.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. (December 4, 2006). *Labor force participation rates of mothers*. Retrieved April 8, 2009, from <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2006/dec/wk1/art01.htm>. and Bureau of Labor Statistics. (May 30, 2008). *Economic News Release: Employment Characteristics of Families*. Retrieved April 8, 2009 from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.nr0.htm>.