



February 11, 2021

Dear Member of Congress:

On behalf of the 170,000 members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I write to urge you to support and advocate for swift passage of the Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act. Introduced on the anniversary of the signing of the Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) Act of 1993, the FAMILY Act would create a permanent national family and medical leave insurance program to help ensure that people who work can take the time they need to address serious health and caregiving needs. It would help support working families' economic security, promote racial and gender equity, create a more level playing field for businesses of all sizes and strengthen our economy.

Our current system is not meeting the basic health and economic needs of workers and their families. Today, only 60 percent of working women have some access to paid sick days and women with less education and lower wages tend to have the least access to paid leave.¹ Working mothers without a college degree are often less likely to have access to paid leave² and are also more likely to be let go from their job or to quit during pregnancy or shortly after childbirth.³ Nearly 40 percent of mothers say they are solely responsible for staying home from work with sick children, compared with only three percent of fathers.⁴ Women disproportionately bear the economic cost of taking children or elderly family members to the doctor.⁵ Yet, many women delay seeking health care for themselves because they cannot take time off work, affecting their capacities as employees and primary caregivers.⁶ Without access to paid leave, women face the continuing economic disadvantage of lost wages and are forced to prematurely return to work.

Persistent racial inequities in access to paid leave result in approximately 71 percent of Latino workers, 67 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native workers, 61 percent of Black workers and 54 percent of Asian American and Pacific Islander workers being ineligible for or unable to afford to take unpaid FMLA leave.⁷ And while women of color are very often key breadwinners for their families,⁸ Black women and Latinas are more likely to work in jobs that provide little upward mobility, stability and lower pay.⁹ Women of color also continue to face punishing wage gaps: Asian American women are typically paid just 87 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, Black women 63 cents, Native women 60 cents and Latinas just 55 cents.¹⁰ This combination of inequities, including the racial wealth gap, means that families of color may be less able to withstand the financial hardship associated with a serious family or medical event and struggle more to recover their economic stability.¹¹

The FAMILY Act is a comprehensive and sustainable solution that would address the nation's paid family and medical leave needs, benefit working people and their families, and provide affordable solutions for employers. Employees would earn two-thirds of their wages, up to a cap, for a limited period of time (up to 60 workdays, or 12 workweeks in a year) to address their own serious health

issue, including pregnancy or childbirth; to deal with the serious health issue of a family member; to care for a new child; and for certain military caregiving and leave purposes. The bill provides 14 emergency paid sick days in the event of a public health emergency, including the current COVID-19 crisis, reimbursed in full by the federal government and will permanently ensure workers can accrue seven paid sick days. Employees, employers and self-employed workers would fund both the benefits and the administrative costs of the program by contributing a small amount in each pay period to a self-sustaining fund, administered through a new Office of Paid Family and Medical Leave. Eligibility rules would allow younger, part-time, low-wage and contingent workers to contribute and benefit, regardless of their employer's size or their length of time on the job.

The coronavirus pandemic highlights in stark relief just how critical it is for workers to have paid leave. In 2020, women lost more than five million jobs. The most recent jobs report shows women account for 100 percent of the jobs lost in December – all 140,000 of them – and women of color made up an overwhelming share of those jobs.¹² As childcare centers closed and schools were forced into remote learning, hundreds of thousands of parents, predominately women, have been forced to choose between caring for their children and staying in the workforce. As of July 2020, nearly one in three mothers aged 25-44 were not working due to childcare issues.¹³ Workers in low-paid frontline and essential jobs are disproportionately women of color.¹⁴ They face higher rates of infection and death in part due to workplace exposure¹⁵ and are typically less likely to have paid leave or the ability to work remotely.¹⁶

A federal paid leave program will build stronger families, healthier workers, successful businesses, and improve overall health outcomes. Equally important, paid leave would increase the economic security of working parents and other caregivers as the pandemic rages on. The FAMILY Act builds on the successes of FMLA by taking meaningful steps toward supporting families and building successful businesses. The approach of the FAMILY Act is affordable, cost-effective, sustainably funded, and does not cut from or reduce benefits from other benefits programs on which people rely.

AAUW stands steadfast in its commitment to improving the lives of women and their families. I urge you to support and pass the FAMILY Act. Cosponsorship and votes associated with this legislation may be scored in the AAUW Action Fund *Congressional Voting Record for the 117th Congress*. Please do not hesitate to contact me at nielsonk@aauw.org or 202.728.7617 or Leticia Bustillos, Federal Policy Manager, at bustillosl@aauw.org or 202.785.7724 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Kate Nielson
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¹ Isaacs, J., Healy, O., & Peters, H.E. (2017). *Paid Family Leader in the United States: Time for a New National Policy*, Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/90201/paid_family_leave_0.pdf.

² Id.

³ Id.

⁴ Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2016). *Paid Sick Days Access and Usage Rates Vary by Race/Ethnicity, Occupation, and Earnings*. <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/B356-paid-sick-days.pdf>.

⁵ Kaiser Family Foundation. (2018). "Women, Work, and Family Health: Key Findings from the 2017 Kaiser Women's Health Survey." <http://files.kff.org/attachment/Issue-Brief-Women-Work-and-Family-Health-Key-Findings-from-the-2017-Kaiser-Womens-Health-Survey>.

⁶ Id.

⁷ Joshi, P., Baldiga, M., & Huber, R. (2020). *Unequal access to FMLA leave persists*. Brandeis University, The Heller School, Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy website: <https://www.diversitydatakids.org/research-library/data-visualization/unequal-access-fmla-leave-persists>.

⁸ Glynn, S. J. (May 10). *Breadwinning Mothers Continue To Be the U.S. Norm*. Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2019/05/10/469739/breadwinning-mothers-continue-u-s-norm/>

⁹ National Partnership for Women and Families. (2018). *Paid Family and Medical Leave: A Racial Justice Issue – and Opportunity*. <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>

¹⁰ National Partnership for Women & Families. (2020). *America's Women and the Wage Gap*. <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/fair-pay/americas-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf>; National Partnership for Women & Families. (2020). *Quantifying America's Gender Wage Gap by Race/Ethnicity*. <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/fair-pay/quantifying-americas-gender-wage-gap.pdf>.

¹¹ National Partnership for Women and Families. (2018).

¹² McGrath, M. (2021, January 12). "American Women Lost More Than 5 Million Jobs In 2020." *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2021/01/12/american-women-lost-more-than-5-million-jobs-in-2020/?__twitter_impression=true&s=09&sh=4cf53e102857.

¹³ Heggeness, M.L., & Fields, J.M. (2020, August 18). *Working Moms Bear Brunt of Home Schooling While Working During COVID-19*. U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/08/parents-juggle-work-and-child-care-during-pandemic.html>.

¹⁴ Rho, H. J., Brown, H., & Fremstad, S. (2020). *A Basic Demographic Profile of Workers in Frontline Industries*. Center for Economic and Policy Research. <https://cepr.net/a-basic-demographic-profile-of-workers-in-frontline-industries/>.

¹⁵ Zelnor, J., Trangucci, R., Narahariseti, R., Cao, A., Malosh, R., Broen, K., Masters, N., & Delamater, P. (2020). Racial disparities in COVID-19 mortality are driven by unequal infection risks. *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, ciaa1723. doi: 10.1093/cid/ciaa1723.

¹⁶ Maye, A., & Williamson, E. (2020). *In Their Own Voices: How Workers Earning Low Wages Struggle with COVID-19*. Center for Law and Social Policy. https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2020/10/2020_Uplifting%20Low-Wage%20Workers%27%20Voices%20and%20Struggles%20Amid%20the%20COVID-19%20Pandemic-2.pdf; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020). *National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2020* (Tables 16 and 31). <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2020/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2020.pdf>; U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Week 19 Household Pulse Survey: November 11 – November 23* (Transportation Table 1. Teleworking during the Coronavirus Pandemic, by Select Characteristics: United States)). <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp19.html>.