



May 18, 2021

Senator Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Committee hearing on “Paid Leave for Working Families: Examining Access, Options, and Impacts

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the 170,000 members and supporters of the American Association of University Women (AAUW), I write to thank the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee for holding this hearing on paid leave and urge you to take swift action in support of a comprehensive paid family and medical leave program. We must ensure that all people, but especially women, have the ability to work and take the time they need to address serious health and caregiving needs without jeopardizing their employment and economic security.

Our current system is not meeting the basic health and economic needs of workers and their families. The lack of a national paid leave program particularly affects women, undermining their ability to fully participate in the workforce. Today, only 60 percent of working women have access to some paid sick days¹ and working mothers without a college degree are less likely to have access to paid leave² and 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 both employees and primary caregivers.⁶ And without access to paid leave, women face the continuing economic disadvantage of lost wages estimated at \$31.9 billion each year in lost wages.⁷ For women over 50 who leave the workforce early to care for an aging parent, there is a loss of more than \$324,000 in wages and retirement.⁸

Persistent racial and gender 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.⁹ The majority of caregivers are women, and of that group, more than half are women of color.¹⁰ And while women of color are very often key breadwinners for their families,¹¹ Black women and Latinas are more likely to work in jobs that provide little upward mobility, stability and lower pay.¹² Women of color also continue to face punishing wage gaps: Asian American women are typically paid just 85 cents for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men, Black women 63 cents, Native women 60 cents and Latinas just 55 cents.¹³ 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵ In December 2020, the U.S. workforce lost 140,000 jobs but women lost a net 156,000 jobs and women of color made up an overwhelming share of those jobs.¹⁶ The April 2021 Bureau of Labor Statistics monthly jobs report revealed that 165,000 women ages 20 and over dropped out of the labor force.¹⁷ As childcare centers closed and schools were forced into remote learning, hundreds of thousands of parents, especially 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.¹⁸ Workers in low-paid frontline and essential jobs have been disproportionately women of color¹⁹ and are typically less likely to have paid leave or the ability to work remotely.²⁰

A federal paid leave program will build stronger families and healthier workers. Paid leave contributes to improved newborn and child health by allowing both parents the time they need to help with health care decisions and responsibilities. For example, time at home with newborns and young children has been shown to, among other benefits, increase parents' ability to attend medical visits and decrease infant and post-neonatal mortality rates.²¹ It also allows ill or injured adults time to recover and gives family members time to care for sick relatives. It enables people to help their loved ones, including older family members with health problems, to recover from illness and avoid complications, thereby reducing hospital readmissions and health costs.²² However, a lack of access to paid leave forces women to make the impossible choice between caring for a family member or keeping their job, potentially hampering their short- and long-term economic security. The absence of a national paid leave policy is unacceptable and must be rectified.

AAUW stands steadfast in its commitment to improving the lives of women and their families and urges you to support comprehensive paid and family leave. 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
Senior Director of Public Policy, Research & Legal Advocacy

¹ Isaacs, J., Healy, O., & Peters, H.E. (2017). Paid Family Leave 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 Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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>.

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- 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-KeyFindings-from-the-2017-Kaiser-Womens-Health-Survey>.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Glynn, S.J. (2020, January 21). "The Rising Cost of Inaction on Work-Family Policies." Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/news/2020/01/21/479555/rising-cost-inaction-work-family-policies/>
- ⁸ MetLife Mature Market Institute. (2011). "The MetLife Study of Caregiving Costs to Working Caregivers: Double Jeopardy for Baby Boomers Caring for Their Parents." <https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/mmi-caregiving-costs-working-caregivers.pdf>
- ⁹ 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/researchlibrary/data-visualization/unequal-access-fmla-leave-persists>.
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- ¹¹ 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/>
- ¹² National Partnership for Women & Families. (2018). "Paid Family and Medical Leave: A Racial Justice Issue – and Opportunity." Washington, DC: National Partnership for Women & Families. <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>.
- ¹³ National Partnership for Women & Families. (2021). 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. (2021). 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>.
- ¹⁴ National Partnership for Women and Families. (2018).
- ¹⁵ Boesch, D. (2021, February 1). "When Women Lose All the Jobs: Essential Actions for a Gender-Equitable Recovery." Washington, DC: Center for American Progress. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2021/02/01/495209/women-lose-jobs-essential-actions-gender-equitable-recovery/>.
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- ²¹ ZERO TO THREE and National Partnership for Women & Families, "The Child Development Case for a National Paid Family and Medical Leave Program," December 2018, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/ourwork/resources/workplace/paid-leave/the-child-development-case-for-a-national-paid-family-and-medical-leave-insuranceprogram.pdf>.
- ²² FAMILY Act Coalition Letter to Congress, May 2019, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/ourwork/resources/workplace/coalition/family-act-coalition-letter.pdf> (citing Institute of Medicine, *Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.17226/12089>; Alicia I. Arbaje et al., "Postdischarge Environmental and Socioeconomic Factors and the Likelihood of Early Hospital Readmission among Community-Dwelling Medicare Beneficiaries," *The Gerontologist* 48, no. 4 (August 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/48.4.495>).