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## Understanding Paid Family and Medical Leave; a program to support two-generational family stability

*Samantha J. Hills, Policy Analyst, Connecticut Association for Human Services, February 14th, 2019*

A comprehensive paid family and medical leave system in Connecticut would be structured as a public insurance system, paid with employee contributions, and would allow citizens of Connecticut to care for a new baby, or in the case of illness, care for themselves or loved ones.

The lack of such a statewide policy leads to disparities among families. Paid family and medical leave is sometimes offered as a benefit by employers, yet because it is dependent on workplace policy, it is offered with more frequency to higher earners and leaves the people who need it most, vulnerable to losing the shred of economic security they might have if they or a family member becomes ill. Only 6% of low wage workers have access to any form of paid family leave, and those who have access to unpaid leave cannot afford to take it. This places people in an impossible situation – to have to choose between family or job. These issues are compounded when we acknowledge that the inequality also runs across racial and ethnic lines. Lack of paid leave disproportionately impacts employees of color, who are overrepresented in low-wage jobs that do not provide this benefit and they may have few to no resources to fall back on if they become ill or must care for a sick family member because of racial gaps in wealth and wages. The absence of a comprehensive paid family medical leave also impacts women disproportionately. Although women are often primary caregivers, in Connecticut, 81% of Black mothers, 66% of Latina mothers, and 48% of white mothers are also key family breadwinners, by providing the sole income in a single-parent household or more than 40% of income in a two-parent household.<sup>1</sup>

Several states have already passed this type of legislation, including California, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York, and most recently Washington state, the District of Columbia, and Massachusetts. Similar legislation is being considered in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. We will soon be the only New England state with no paid family leave and it will be hard to be considered a progressive leader or to attract a talented workforce in a competitive environment.

Between 75–85% of claims made in California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island are to care for a new child.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Paid leave gives parents time to establish a strong bond with a new child during the first

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, J. (2016, September 8). Breadwinner Mothers by Race/Ethnicity and State. Institute for Women's Policy Research Publication. Retrieved 20 December 2018, from <https://iwpr.org/publications/breadwinner-mothers-by-raceethnicity-and-state>

<sup>2</sup> State of California Employment Development Department. (2018). Paid Family Leave (PFL) – Monthly Data. Retrieved 26 September 2018 2018, from <https://data.edd.ca.gov/Disability-Insurance/Paid-Family-Leave-PFL-Monthly-Data/r95e-fvkm/data>

<sup>3</sup> State of New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. (2010–2017). Family Leave Program Statistics (2010–2016). Retrieved 26 September 2018, from [http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/fli/content/fli\\_program\\_stats.html](http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/fli/content/fli_program_stats.html); State of New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development.(2010). 2009 Monthly Statistics. Retrieved 26 September 2018, from [http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/fli/content/2009\\_monthly\\_report\\_fli.html](http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/fli/content/2009_monthly_report_fli.html) (Unpublished calculation; data are through December 2016)

<sup>4</sup> Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training. (n.d.). Monthly TDI/TCI Claims Summary. Retrieved 26 September 2018, from <http://www.dlt.ri.gov/lmi/uiadmin.htm> (Unpublished calculation; data are through December 2017)



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months of life, which results in long-term health benefits for both children and parents.<sup>5</sup> The ability of new mothers and fathers to receive paid family leave reduces dependence on SNAP and other welfare benefits.<sup>6</sup> In addition, in California, where paid family legislation was passed in 2004, while all businesses report positive or neutral effects, among businesses with 50 or fewer employees, the results are even more favorable, with business owners reporting that paid family leave reduces turnover costs and improves profitability, productivity, retention, and employee morale.<sup>7</sup> Passing paid family leave in Connecticut would allow small businesses to better compete and attract qualified workers by providing comparable benefits to larger companies. It would strengthen our workforce by making it more productive and reducing staff turnover. Paid family and medical leave will not only attract more workers to stay in Connecticut, but will also create a sustaining environment in which future generations stay and contribute to the prosperity of our state.

The benefits of passing paid family leave far surpass the small cost to employees. Weighed against a state that values family; health; attracting and maintaining a strong workforce; a thriving economy; healthier businesses including the ability for small business to compete; and greater equity for women, people of color, and low-income workers; the choice is simple. It is time for Connecticut to pass this important legislation to continue 21<sup>st</sup> century progress.

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<sup>5</sup> National Partnership for Children and Families (September 2018), Paid Leave Works, Retrieved 11 February 2019 from <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/paid-leave-works-in-california-new-jersey-and-rhode-island.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Houser, L., & Vartanian, T. (2012, April). Policy Matters; Public Policy, Paid Leave for New Parents, and Economic Security for U.S. Workers. Center for Women and Work at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey Publication. Retrieved 26 September 2018, from [http://go.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/RutgersCWW\\_Policy\\_Matters\\_April2012.pdf](http://go.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/RutgersCWW_Policy_Matters_April2012.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Appelbaum, E., & Milkman, R. (2013). Unfinished Business: Paid Family Leave in California and the Future of U.S. Work-Family Policy. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press