



EFFECTIVE MESSAGING

On Paid Family Leave

It is easy to talk about paid family leave (PFL) because of its popularity with Republicans and Democrats as well as its many benefits to families and society. While paid family leave has many applications – parental leave following the birth or adoption of a new child, family caregiving leave to care for a loved one, or personal medical leave – parental leave is very popular with conservatives and an important policy to advance in the pro-family agenda. Depending on the audience and what resonates the most personally, one can choose a few of the topics below to make a strong argument in support of this important policy.

MOST WORKERS DO NOT HAVE PAID FAMILY LEAVE.

Strong families are the key to strong communities. Currently, only 19% of Americans have access to PFL after the birth or adoption of a child.¹ Because of this, a quarter of all mothers go back to work within 10-14 days after having a child, with fathers going back even sooner.² A federal PFL policy would ensure that all families have time together after the birth or adoption of a new child, giving every family the best opportunity to start off strong.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE IMPROVES THE HEALTH AND WELFARE OF CHILDREN.

Studies show that children who are deprived of early bonding with parents have negative physical and mental health outcomes.³ PFL allows time together as a family, regardless of income, so every child develops strong bonds with their parents. In addition, having ten weeks of PFL was associated with a 10% lower neonatal and infant mortality rate.⁴ With mothers at home, children are also more likely to be breastfed and have regular doctors' visits.⁵ Children benefit by having their parents home those first few months of life.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE KEEPS PARENTS OFF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE.

Some new parents are forced out of the workforce and onto public assistance in order to spend time together during those first few months after the birth of a new baby.⁶ Research confirms that mothers who have PFL are 39% less likely to receive public assistance and 40% less likely to use food stamps.⁷ PFL keeps workers connected to the workforce and ready to return when their leave is over, increasing positive outcomes for the mother and the child. In addition, since the parents continue to be taxpayers instead of government aid recipients, this has a positive impact on the federal budget.

STUDIES SHOW INCREASED INVOLVEMENT OF FATHERS BECAUSE OF PAID FAMILY LEAVE.

Research indicate that even fathers produce the “love hormone” oxytocin that mothers produce when in close contact with a new child, creating strong, lifelong bonds.⁸ Other studies show that fathers who take PFL are more likely to be involved in child rearing. Then, children with highly involved fathers perform better in cognitive tests.⁹ It is clear that families and society benefit when fathers and children have time to develop strong bonds at the beginning of a child’s life.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE IS PRO-LIFE AND REDUCES ABORTION

Most women seeking abortions cite cost as the main determining factor and how that would interfere with work, school, or the ability to care for other children.¹⁰ In addition, 49% of those seeking an abortion live below the federal poverty level, where only 9% have access to PFL.¹¹ Imagine having a PFL policy that promotes life by supporting a mother to stay home and care for her newborn.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE HELPS THE FEDERAL BUDGET BY INCREASING BIRTHRATE.

The number of babies born in the United States just hit the lowest rate in the past 30 years, at 1.71 live births per woman, down 1% from the previous year. In order to maintain our population and taxpayer base, we need a replacement rate of 2.1.¹² Yet studies show that women’s preference for childbearing would produce a birthrate of 2.7.¹³ Having a federal PFL policy would go far towards supporting families to have the number of children they desire.

THE ECONOMY HAS CHANGED, FAMILY-WAGE JOBS ARE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN FOR YOUNG PARENTS.

In previous generations, most full-time jobs paid enough to raise a family. Currently, family-wage jobs are more difficult to find, especially for young workers. 44% of all workers are considered “low wage,” earning an annual salary of \$18,000 with an hourly wage of \$10.22.¹⁴ The Federal Reserve has reported that 44% of Americans are unable to afford a \$400 emergency, with 17% unable to pay all their bills in full each month.¹⁵ A federal PFL policy ensures that a new child is not a financial catastrophe, regardless of income or age of parents.

GOP SUPPORTED PAID FAMILY LEAVE PLANS ARE BUDGET NEUTRAL WITH NO NEW TAXES.

Republicans have been a part of introducing three separate PFL plans in Congress that are budget neutral. Senators Marco Rubio and Mitt Romney along with Representatives Ann Wagner and Dan Crenshaw introduced The New Parents Act in March of 2019.¹⁶ That same month, Senators Mike Lee and Joni Ernst introduced a similar plan called The CRADLE Act.¹⁷ Both of these bills allow parents to withdraw Social Security benefits to stay home after the birth or adoption of a new child and then pay the cost back by simply retiring a few months later than they would have otherwise. The first bipartisan plan was introduced in December by Senators Bill Cassidy and Kyrsten Sinema.¹⁸ The Advancing Support for Working Families Act allows new parents to receive \$5000, and then reduce their Child Tax Credit deduction on their federal taxes by \$500 annually over the course of 10 years in order to pay it back. Since there are so many benefits from PFL, these plans offer a strong return on investment by strengthening families without adding to the budget deficit.

THERE IS WIDE SUPPORT FOR PAID FAMILY LEAVE, EVEN AMONG THE MOST CONSERVATIVE AUDIENCES.

Various polls show that most Americans support PFL and that support cuts across party, gender, and ideological lines. 71% of all Americans support PFL (66% of men, 75% of women), with 69% supporting it for the purpose of caring for a newborn (65% of conservatives). PFL is no longer a controversial issue, as 43% said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate who supports it, and only 12% less likely (for GOP 29% more likely, 19% less likely).¹⁹

STRONG PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR TEMPORARY SICK LEAVE AND PAID MEDICAL FAMILY LEAVE DURING COVID.

Most Americans believe that all workers should be able to stay home if ill or caring for ill family members (83% vs. 8%). 87% support the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), providing federal funds to keep employees on payroll temporarily during this pandemic. With schools and daycare closed, 66% supported paid leave to care for children, with just 15% opposing.²⁰

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5 Berger, Lawrence M., Jennifer Hill, and Jane Waldfogel. 2005. "[Maternity Leave, Early Maternal Employment and Child Health and Development in the US.](#)" *Wiley Online Library.*

6 "[To Grow Our Economy, Start with Paid Leave.](#)" 2019. *Cato Institute.*

7 McGuire, Ashley E. 2018. "[Perspective. How Conservatives Are Poised to Actually Make Paid Family Leave a Reality.](#)" *The Washington Post.*

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12 Galvin, Gabby. 2020. "[U.S. Births Continue to Fall, Fertility Rate Hits Record Low.](#)" *U.S. News & World Report.*

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17 Lee, Mike. 2019. "[Sens. Ernst, Lee Put Forward Paid Parental Leave Plan That Is Budget Neutral and Flexible for Parents.](#)" Sens. Ernst, Lee Put Forward Paid Parental Leave Plan That is Budget Neutral and Flexible for Parents - Press Releases.

18 "[Cassidy, Sinema, Allred, Stefanik Introduce Bipartisan Bill Supporting Parents in Critical First Year Following Births, Adoptions: U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana.](#)" 2019. *Press Release. U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy of Louisiana*.

19 Anderson, Kristen Soltis. 2020. "[The Voters' Policy Preference on Paid Family Leave.](#)" *Echelon Insights on behalf of Ethics and Public Policy*.

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