

Paid Family Leave for Hawai'i's Families

FACT SHEET #1

Hawai'i's workforce is stronger when employees can balance work, family, and life's challenges. Nearly all workers need to take time away from the job at some point to care for a new child or a seriously ill family member. Employees in Hawai'i do not have any legal right to paid family leave, and most cannot take unpaid leave and still maintain financial stability given the high cost of living in our state. A paid family leave program that is **available to everyone**, regardless of where they work, can provide families with job protection and the flexibility to meet their needs without losing pay.

Current Policies Are Failing Many of Hawai'i's Families

For those working in a business with 50 or more employees, the federal Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides *unpaid* leave and job protection for up to 12 weeks to care for a new child or family member, or to attend to a personal medical condition. The Hawai'i Family Leave Law (HFLL) expands on the federal law to some extent, for example, allowing employees unpaid leave to care for a parent-in-law or grandparent. However, HFLL only provides unpaid leave and job protection for up to 4 weeks for workers in businesses with 100 or more employees. As a result, about 37% of the workforce is excluded from the law's protection. Both laws allow for accrued paid leave, such as sick leave, to be used in some cases so that employees can at least receive pay for part of their protected leave. However, estimates indicate that more than 4 in 10 private sector employees in Hawai'i do not have access to paid sick days.

Paid Family Leave Supports Overall Family Wellbeing

- Paid family leave allows workers to support their families and make ends meet when they need to take time to care for a new child or a family member with a serious illness. Research shows that parents who have access to paid leave following the birth of a child are less likely to rely on public assistance and are more likely to return to and remain in the workforce.
- Child health is also improved when parents can take the time needed for bonding with and caring for a new child without worrying about reduced income. Increased access to paid family leave is linked to improved birthweight, longer periods of breastfeeding, and reduced infant mortality. Research further shows that when parents have adequate time to care for a seriously ill child, recovery is improved and hospital stays are shortened. Paid family leave is also associated with increased involvement of fathers in children's lives.
- A growing number of workers must also balance work and caring for other family members, including older adults, such as parents. About 15% of Hawai'i's population is 65 years and older and with increasing longevity, the share of older adults in our state will continue to grow. Many of these older adults live in multigenerational households with their children and grandchildren. Therefore, it is not uncommon for Generation X families to face the combined pressure of caring for their children and aging parents and relatives. Paid family leave is critical given this growing need to provide care across the lifecycle.

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Paid Family Leave is Also Good for Business and the Overall Economy

- Data from states that have successfully implemented paid family leave confirm that concerns about negative impacts on businesses are indeed unfounded. In California, for example, employers report positive effects on productivity, profit, and performance. Paid family leave programs contribute to reduced turnover and increase employee engagement and loyalty, saving businesses the costs of replacing employees. Studies from California and New Jersey also show that employees do not abuse paid family leave programs and, on average, take less than the maximum time allowed.
- In an employee-funded program, employers do not pay for wages while workers are on leave. Employers' savings can be used for temporary workers or to pay other employees overtime. When they offer the benefit of paid family leave, small businesses can compete in recruiting and retaining talented employees.
- Paid family leave not only keeps workers in the labor force and promotes family economic security, it also helps businesses thrive with a stable workforce that further contributes to the economy. Over time, paid family leave can contribute to our state's economic productivity and growth.

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What a Paid Family Leave Program Could Look Like in Hawai'i

Families should not have to choose between caring for a new child or sick family member and receiving a paycheck or keeping their job. The U.S. is the only industrialized country without a paid family leave program for the working population. However, California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island have successfully implemented paid family leave and New York's law will take effect in 2018. Hawai'i needs to join these states in leading the nation.

A paid family leave program in Hawai'i could:

- be employee-funded through a small monthly payroll deduction (roughly the cost of a cup of coffee for the average worker),
- provide partial wage replacement, and
- be available to all of Hawai'i's employees, regardless of where they work or the size of their company.

What You Can Do

Learn more about how paid family leave can support Hawai'i's families. Join the campaign for paid family leave policy. Visit the Hawai'i Children's Action Network at http://www.hawaii-can.org/paid_family_leave, Hawai'i KIDS COUNT at uhfamily.hawaii.edu/, or the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women at <http://humanservices.hawaii.gov/hscsw/>.

