

SPECIAL DELIVERY FROM MOMSRISING

AMERICAN FAMILIES NEED
PAID FAMILY LEAVE!



STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES OF MOTHERHOOD:

Women and mothers from across the country share how important access to paid family leave is for their families.

[MomsRising.org](https://www.MomsRising.org)

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Dear Member of Congress,

We have an important occasion to celebrate this year: 2013 is the year that the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) turns 20. For the last 20 years, the FMLA has been used to provide job-protected, unpaid leave to women and men across the country to recover from a serious illness, care for a new child, or care for a seriously ill spouse, parent, or child. [1]

In honor of this occasion, I would like to present to you a small sampling of personal, heartwarming and heart wrenching stories from MomsRising members across the country about access to family leave.

While we celebrate the FMLA of the past 20 years, these stories also reflect the importance of why our national policies need to be updated and expanded to include more Americans and why that leave needs to include wage replacement (also known as paid family leave).

Paid family leave after the birth of a child helps give kids a healthy start in life and gives families the economic security they need to stay out of poverty – and at the same time it can benefit businesses' bottom line. This saves everyone – from parents to taxpayers to businesses – money in the long-run. In fact, studies show that paid family leave after the birth of a child combats poverty, gives children a healthy start, lowers infant mortality by more than 20%, [2] and helps lower the wage gap between women and men. [3] Paid leave also benefits taxpayers, because, as recent research from the Center for Women and Work at Rutgers shows: [4]

- Women who take paid leave are 39% less likely to need or receive public assistance
- Women who take paid leave are 40% less likely to need or receive food stamps in the year following a child's birth when compared to those who do not take any leave
- Paid family leave also reduces the chance that a family receiving public assistance will increase their use of public funding following a child's birth
- Women who use paid leave are more likely to be working 9-12 months after a child's birth than those who do not take any leave
- And these women also report increases in wages before and after birth.

Paid family leave isn't just good for children, families, and taxpayers – it also benefits employers. A study of the California Paid Leave program showed that most employers found that the Paid Family Leave had a positive effect on productivity, profitability and performance, turnover and employee morale. [5] In addition, paid family leave helps level the playing field for many small businesses which wouldn't normally be able to afford leave since the majority of the policies that MomsRising supports are paid by small employee paycheck deductions and NOT by businesses. It's a win-win.

And still, while 177 other countries have some form of paid leave for new moms after the birth of a child, the U.S. isn't one of them, an omission that sets up our families for failure. [6] Don't just take our word for it: Included in this book is a sampling of personal stories and first-hand accounts about the need for paid family leave from parents across the country.

Thank you for serving our nation, and please don't hesitate to let me know how MomsRising can assist you in moving forward for paid family leave.

Sincerely,
Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner,
Executive Director & Co-Founder MomsRising

[1] National Partnership calculation derived from U.S. Department of Labor estimates of the number of leaves taken annually. See *The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993; Proposed Rule*, 73 Fed. Reg. 7876, 7944 (Feb. 11, 2008) (multiplying DOL estimate of 7 million workers per year by the 19 years since FMLA enactment). [2] Sakiko Tanaka, "Parental Leave and Child Health Across OECD Countries," *Economic Journal* 115, no. 501 (2005) [3] Waldfoegel, Jane "Understanding the 'Family Gap' in Pay for Women with Children," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, no. 1 (1998), 137-156 [4] Linda Houseer, PhD and Thomas Vartanian, PhD "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public," *A Report for the Center for Women and Work*, January 2012 [5] Applebaum, Eileen and Ruth Milkman "Leaves that Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California" January 2011 [6] www.RaisingtheGlobalFloor.org

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MomsRising Members Speak Out on Paid Family Leave

ALABAMA

Rebecca, Toney, AL

Each time I had to take maternity leave, it left our house in financial turmoil. These days, households must run on a two parental income or sink. When I got pregnant with my last child, we moved to Alabama. I was (and still) unable to gain employment because the employer would be short staffed for 6 weeks or more until a daycare opened up a spot for the new baby. Speaking of daycare, that is another issue that makes it difficult to pay for the older siblings while the mother is out for maternity leave.

Karen, Portland, AL

I didn't have any paid maternity leave, so with both my first and my second baby I went back to teaching classes at the university one week after they were born.

The first one was born in the middle of the term, so my TA read two lectures I had prepared ahead of time while I recuperated from my C-section; the second

baby came over winter break, so I didn't miss any classes. I prepared classes while nursing babies, I taught classes with my husband holding the baby outside the door (I wasn't allowed to drive for six weeks after each C-section).

Yes, the university would have given me unpaid leave, but we couldn't afford unpaid leave. They would have given me sick leave, but I hadn't been there long enough to build up enough sick leave. I had been in graduate school, finishing my doctorate. Paid maternity leave is what I needed, and what I should have had.

Valencia, Irvington, AL

I had to go back to work three weeks after having my first baby. I convinced myself that I didn't need to take the full 6 weeks I had envisioned having; the reality was entirely different. I was tired, still sore because standing on my feet for long hours made my body realize that it had just delivered a baby, and I was missing out with bonding time with my son.

It is sad that this country doesn't recognize that mothers and fathers deserve to have time to adjust to having a newborn in the house and to be able to bond as a family. All without worrying about having money to pay bills or a job to come back to. We say we are the greatest country in the world, but sometimes we fall far short of that title.

ALASKA

Rosemary, Anchorage, AK

I was a stay at home mother and raised 6 children on my husband's salary. I also write and I make and sell craft items from my home. We did without a lot of luxuries and made ends meet, but not everyone can do that, even with just one child.

The mother-infant bond is extremely important and not all places of employment recognize this. Please help new mothers and fathers in this respect.

ARIZONA

Joanna, Mesa, AZ

Fortunately we were living in Germany for my daughter's birth and Canada for my son's birth. I did not have work visas either place, but if I had I would have been so much better off than the writer in this article. In Germany I would have been eligible for 6 months paid leave, plus up to another 1.5 years that my husband or I could take while retaining the right to go back to our jobs.

In most developed countries 'family values' means it is possible for the parents to actually raise their own children without going bankrupt. Here 'family values' means the parents must go back to work before the baby is close to a proper age for weaning. Marginal to no support for QUALITY child-care is the norm in the US. Why are we willing to let underpaid, untrained strangers raise our children? And why do we wonder why we have so much disconnect with our offspring here?

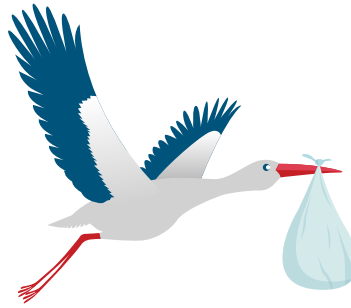
Neda, Scottsdale, AZ

Have two great kids but received no help or support when they were born. We need to support our families in this country.

Breeanne, Phoenix, AZ

I am a first time mom. My husband and I saved up as much money as we could to prepare for our sons birth. We never took sick or vacation days so that we could have as much time with our son as possible. My husband only got one week to spend with his newborn son before he had to go back to work.

One week is not enough to get a routine down or bond with your child. I had been working at my job for 6 months before I left to give birth. I was not there the required



IN THE UNITED STATES
ONLY 49%
OF MOMS ARE ABLE
TO COBBLE TOGETHER
PAID LEAVE

USING SICK DAYS, VACATION,
DISABILITY & MATERNITY LEAVE

Bureau of Labor Statistics Press Release: Employment Characteristics of Families 2009, May 2010

year to get maternity leave. In those 6 months I worked myself from the bottom to being the store manager. I accomplished a lot while I was there. I don't feel that the required one year is acceptable. One year is pretty much impossible with the turn around rate at my company.

I feel it should be easier to obtain paid maternity/paternity leave. The first few weeks of a child's life are crucial. It's a very hard choice to make between your child and your job. Sadly many parents are forced to choose their job.

Ann, Tucson, AZ

I cannot imagine having a child in the USA. I am an immigrant from India (yes, third world country) where women in most cities receive at least 4 months PAID maternity leave. I cannot imagine how this 'beacon of democracy' does not give women even a day's paid leave. Especially in light of the

fact that politicians claim the child is so important, birth control is highly controlled and abortions are frowned on.

It seems to me that politicians here refuse to take responsibility for their policy the moment the child is actually born, then to hell with he/she. Cut Headstart, no WIC, nothing. It is appalling to me.

Kathy, Phoenix, AZ

I continued to work part-time so I wouldn't lose my job entirely. I had great difficulty finding child care when my husband (a pilot) was gone.

Stacie, Tempe, AZ

I feel very lucky that I had a 12-week paid leave after the birth of my daughter three years ago. My employer provided six weeks paid, and I had six weeks paid through short-term disability insurance (which I paid for through my employer). The 12 weeks went by too fast, and I couldn't imagine going back to work any sooner. However, I know a lot of women who only had six weeks. A six-week-old baby is tiny and in no way is mom ready to leave them at that point. Not to mention she is not rested or ready to go back to work.

I have since left the university that provided the paid leave option and am now working at my family's small business. I will not have the same opportunity for a 12-week paid leave after my next child is born. I will be lucky to get 4 weeks paid, and might need more time unpaid. Our business is unable to provide such a benefit at this point, and does not offer the short-term disability insurance.

I've thought about this issue a lot since becoming a mother. I have met other moms from Canada and Australia, and they are appalled at



the lack of benefits we have in this country. Mothers in Canada and Australia typically take at least 6 months off, most often paid, and many take up to a year with a guaranteed return to work. What an awesome way to bond with your baby and give them the best start possible in their first year of life.

I think one of the easiest solutions would be to offer some type of short-term disability insurance to anyone who wanted to pay for it, and that would provide paid leave, regardless of what their employer offered. FMLA is great, but it doesn't apply to all employers, and obviously doesn't offer payment to parents. I know many people who would be willing to pay into this type of benefit so that they would be able to take the time off.

Jan , Tucson, AZ

As a counselor working with young moms and babies, I strongly agree that the very early days are important for bonding issues. Having mother and baby together in this process only makes for healthier young children and is cost effective in all areas...especially education.

Brain research is currently showing that this special bonding time helps promote brain growth and healthy emotional states. Please consider this in the bigger picture of our country's welfare.

Cynthia, Patagonia, AZ

I needed money when my kids were born, so paid leave to take care of them would have been the proper thing to have, but I didn't. My babies didn't sleep well in the beginning, and it was real hard for me to concentrate on accomplishing anything other than caring for them. Anxiety about losing my job and being unable to pay my bills made it worse.

Now parents need all the support they can get. Part time/flex

“Brain research is currently showing that this special bonding time helps promote brain growth and healthy emotional states.”

Jan, Tucson, AZ

time work from home would be a great option since managing a small amount of work other than infant care was all that could have been done during the first three months. It was difficult too even take time for a shower, and I lost weight since I had little time to eat. Babies need a lot of care, so do new moms!

Please support legislation that gives New Born Americans and their families a financial boost during the difficult newborn period.

Annette, Apache Junction, AZ

I was able to visit and help care for my mother on a monthly basis in 1994 when she was battling terminal cancer. She was out of state. And again, in 2000 with my father, also out of state. It was so nice to be able to spend time with them in their final months and days without the worry of losing your job.

Nicole, Mesa, AZ

I was blessed in that my employer met the FMLA standards. I was able to take the 6 weeks guaranteed leave for my first born (actually I got 8 since he was a surprise C-section!) plus additional vacation time I had banked. Two years later when I had my second, I was still

with the same employer so got the same leave plus my additional vacation time.

My husband was also able to take time off to bond with his new sons for both births. I am continually amazed at the stories of those less fortunate than I. How can we not provide this protection for all new parents?!

Robert, Mesa, AZ

In early 2004 I took seven weeks of leave, under FMLA, because my job was getting to be too stressful for me. The break has allowed me to remain with the same employer, now nine years later. I am getting ready to put in a request to my employer, to take off two weeks, later this month, under FMLA, as my mother recovers from hip replacement surgery.

Altagracia, Tucson, AZ

My daughter Lindsey is due to have her first baby in March. She works for a restaurant, but they have no maternity leave whatsoever, right now she is so stressed because she does not know what to do once she has her baby, and has no income coming in. What is it with our government, we are supposedly the top of the line country, yet we are so behind in giving new moms and dads maternity leave.

When I had my daughters I worked for Uncle Sam, so I had great maternity leave, and was able to stay home with my girls. I don't know what is going to happen to my daughter once she has the baby, she can't even get temporary disability, or unemployment, she is not eligible for ANYTHING, that is not right. Something has to be done.

Amber, Phoenix, AZ

My daughter came unexpectedly at a time which couldn't have been more perfect. My partner,

WOMEN WITH ACCESS TO LEAVE ARE ALMOST 70 PERCENT MORE LIKELY TO COME BACK TO WORK 3 MONTHS TO ONE YEAR AFTER HAVING A CHILD THAN WOMEN WHO HAVE NO ACCESS TO LEAVE



Lawrence M. Berger and Jane Waldfogel, "Maternity Leave and the Employment of New Mothers in the United States," *Journal of Population Economics* 17 (2) (2004): 331-349.

whom I had been with for 5 years had said from the start of our relationship that he wanted to be a stay at home father. Myself, having the work experience decided I was going to be the working parent and found a full time paid position with a small business who hired me at 6 months into my pregnancy.

After my c-section I was 5 days in the hospital and then only 3 weeks at home before returning to work in order to keep my job and in order to be able to afford to pay for rent/food/etc. I do not blame my boss for not providing me with more time paid to spend with my family, but I do blame the mindset of the 'most prosperous nation in the world' who demonizes the concept of paying workers to bond with their new families. My boss expected what he did because it is the nature of the business to do so and that is what needs to change.

Sarah, Laveen, AZ

When my husband and I learned we were having twins, life changed. I was working a retail management position in order to support us while my husband finished a masters degree program. We knew that I would have paid maternity leave for 8 weeks after the birth and I had saved up some vacation days as well. I cannot tell how crucial it was to have that income, especially considering I was the sole source of income for our

family! Our twins arrived 7 weeks pre-mature and stayed in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit until their due date.

Our days were spent driving back and forth to the hospital, countless hours of pumping for me and many more hours of work for my husband trying to fast-track his dissertaion. It wasn't until my paid leave had almost ended that we were finally able to bring our babies home. When we learned that one of them would need continued and constant medical care for quite some time, I eventually ended up quitting while on un-paid leave following maternity leave. We truly lived off of the money coming from my paid leave while our boys were hospitalized. It was the only thing keeping us above water.

Tonya, Phoenix, AZ

When my twins were born 17 years ago, they came 3 months early and had to stay in the NICU for 3.5 months. Not only did I have to leave the hospital without my babies, I had to return to work within 2 weeks because I did not have paid maternity leave and I needed to make sure my sons were covered by insurance – especially when they were so fragile. I wish to this day that I could have spent more time with my babies that first year.

It was hard when they were at the hospital and even harder when they came home with sleep apnea

monitors and a host of respiratory problems. I couldn't stop working and not have them covered by insurance and because of that, I feel like I missed the most important bonding times with my boys. It's just something I will never get back.

ARKANSAS

Shawn, Ponca, AR

After the birth of our first daughter in December of 2009, we thought we had prepared financially. However, thinking you are prepared and actually being prepared are two different things. I was committed to breastfeeding my daughter, and knew that this meant I would need to breastfeed on demand for at least 6 weeks, which meant that I would need to delay returning to work.

My husband had saved up vacation, personal and sick time and was able to stay home with us for almost 2 months, which was amazing, because I couldn't really do much but sit and nurse. However, even after we were both back at work (me part-time as a midwife and my husband full-time as a teacher), we found that our combined income didn't cover our expenses. We had to make some hard choices and ended up taking some loans out against an annuity and relying on student loans to cover the gaps.

While I am grateful that we had these resources even available, I also realize that we basically put ourselves even more behind in order to pay the bills at the time. It was a pretty horrible feeling. In my job as a midwife, I see families struggling to make ends meet after the birth of a child and it just breaks my heart. No one should have to choose between spending



vital and much needed time with a newborn and returning to work. It is a heartbreaking situation and absolutely infuriating that our country does not value parenting as much as we do other vocations.

Lyuba, Little Rock, AR

I am currently staying at home on FMLA with my second daughter. I am taking 3 month off as I did with my first child. I saved my paid leave (vacation+sick days) from last year and the current year to pay for about half of it, the rest is unpaid. This means no vacation/sick leave for the last year or this – I am not sure what this means if my kid gets sick at daycare and I have to stay home with her after I go back to work.

The point is, it is a huge financial and emotional burden on a family to take unpaid time off like this at the time when a young family needs all the support it can get – having a child, though one of the happiest events in our lives, is taxing in many ways! Most countries recognize the benefits of parents spending time stress-free with their fragile newborns, it is time US stepped up!

Sarah, Little Rock, AR

I'm an American mom of two little boys, and I'm currently living in Canada, where I have received a full year – that's 12 months! – of paid maternity leave. It has been the most incredible experience of my life, and I know it has been the best possible start in life that I could have provided my youngest son. When my oldest son was born I was only able to take three months of maternity leave.

The next nine months were a constant slog of anxiety and exhaustion, where I was neither a good mom to my son nor a good employee to my employer. I am about to return to work after the

year of paid maternity leave I enjoyed for the birth of my second son. I am returning to a happy, well-rested mom with a thriving, well-adjusted son. And I will be forever grateful to this country and to my current employer for giving me the best gift a working mom could ever have! American families deserve this, too!

“...I feel like I missed the most important bonding times with my boys. It's just something I will never get back.”

Tonya, Phoenix, AZ

Kelly, Bigelow, AR

My kids are older now (24 & 27) but even back then I was one of the very lucky ones because I had paid leave for my youngest and don't know how we would have survived all the extra expenses if I was not getting paid. I was not so lucky with my first child and quit my job. But was able to get another job which is the one that I had with my second child that had paid leave.

So I've seen it from both sides. With my first child we were forced to move in with my mother because without my income as well as my husbands we could not make it. After getting a job and moving back out on our own I had my second child with paid leave and have never had to move back to my mothers again. I love my mother and bless her heart she would do anything for us but when you have a family you want to be on your own and not burden anybody else.

David, Pacifica, CA

About 34 years ago my 3 year old son had a high fever and I had to take him to the hospital. The next day after missing work that evening the boss called me in to the office. I asked for my union steward to accompany me. The boss said I am docking you the pay for yesterday and putting you on a warning because of the absence. I said I had to take my son to the hospital! He said 'That's why you have a wife.'

After the union settled the grievance I was paid for the day and the warning was removed but the absence still counted on their attendance policy. I became a union Representative and I worked with Labor's Project for Working Families to get the first paid family leave passed in California. My son used it to care for his wife and bond with my grandson. See the picture of my family all of us were able to use FMLA and other laws to care for our family. I was able to care for my mother in her last days because of FMLA/ and not be warned for the absence.

I worked on a case the first one to enforce a sick leave law in California allowing employees to use their sick leave to care for their kin. I heard of a case of a woman in Connecticut who was fired for caring for her infants while her husband was deployed to Iraq and I wrote a song and poem about it.

Laura, Sacramento, CA

After having my first son, my family suffered such a loss in income I was forced to go back to work WAY before I was ready to leave the baby. It created such a stressful time for my husband and I, and I experienced some time depressed.

I also want to point out, my heart was NOT in my job during that

time....and I teach grade school. Lose/lose situation! Had I been able to spend a longer time bonding with my son without the financial catastrophe on the back burner during an already very stressful time, it would have made a world of difference, and a much smoother adjustment to our new lifestyle as a family.

Dhar, Campbell, CA

After our son was born, my mother came to live with us to care for him while I went back to work, and my husband pursued his studies full time. We had tried a baby-sitting service in our neighborhood, but the winter was bitter, and our son caught every bug everyone else had. It's obvious that every parent needs to have paid leave to take care of his/her newborn.

Stephanie, Walnut Creek, CA

Almost 12 years ago, my son was born with life-threatening GERD. He was on strong medication, an apnea monitor, and did not sleep through the night (due to the pain being so severe) until he was well over 2 years old (meaning, we, his parents, did not sleep through the night either, as 'crying it out' was not an option medically). Breast-milk was pretty much the only option as most formulas at that time caused the GERD to worsen. Because of the need for nearly round the clock constant attention, he was not able to go to daycare and hiring a nanny was not in our financial situation.

Thank goodness for FMLA! While at the time FMLA was unpaid, my husband and I were able to extend our vacation hours with back to back unpaid FMLA to take care of our son. I shudder to think what would have happened if this had not been an option: two parents working and not sleeping for 2.5 years; entrusting that our child would get the care he needed with

177 COUNTRIES HAVE SOME FORM OF PAID LEAVE FOR NEW MOMS



THE U.S. IS NOT ONE OF THEM

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a non-family member; no easily accessible breastmilk; etc. FMLA is necessary for all working families.

Marcella, San Diego, CA

As a full-time graduate student, paid family leave was not an option. I just took a semester off, which meant no student loans. We had to take out a hefty loan to cover what I wasn't bringing in. My husband had 2 weeks of sick leave and 2 weeks of vacation saved up, so he was able to cash those in and still get paid while he took a month off (starting with the day I went into labor.) Unfortunately though, that meant that he couldn't go with the baby and me to visit my parents for Christmas.

Jennifer, Arcata, CA

As a graduate student when I gave birth, I was fortunate to be a research assistant, but really was supposed to pretend I was working – no paid leave but insurance made a big difference through this assistant-ship. We could only work out this tacit arrangement for about 6 weeks; meaning my supervisor just didn't give me work for that

amount of time, but then visited me with gifts from the office at 6 weeks and inquired gingerly, 'Are you ready to come back to work?'.... These were compassionate folks in a bind – they couldn't keep me on the payroll but couldn't 'fire' me (in their hearts, legally they could have replaced me as my situation was not covered under the Family Medical Leave Act).

I felt so terrible the entire time – a bad, slacker employee, a bad, slacker mother... I had had medical issues and my midwife had urged me to go on disability. She was emphatic that going back to work after really almost 5 weeks of my child's life with low birth weight related to trouble breast feeding (weighing him at every feeding and writing down what he 'took in'). At 5 weeks we returned the hospital scale, he went to a women's house 3 days a week – she only took babies. Came with recommendations. I paid more than I made, but kept my insurance (the driver in all this). No family where we lived. And, of course, in many ways I was 'lucky' in that I had some options-my work tried where they could to be flexible and my time wasn't entirely sucked up with my job.

Just thinking about it now – 6 years later – brings me tears. It was a hard, hard time. No one should be forced back to work, but most of us are. My child was okay, but my situation was not as severe as most people's are.

Dera, Los Angeles, CA

As a mother and birth support professional I know first hand how important paid family leave is to a new mom adjusting to her new body, bonding with the baby and other family members in their new roles. It takes six plus weeks for a woman's physical body to heal properly not to mention she is si-



multaneously in recovery. It is tantamount that women/families have this time to bond and promote a healthy vibrant family experience. When families are cared for and supported and protected the whole society is able to thrive.

Graciela, Hayward, CA

At the risk of writing a novel on this topic, let me pose a question: what happens when this first baby comes severely prematurely, at 25 1/2 weeks in my case, and spends 137 days in the NICU in the hospital? Even having paid family leave through my employer proved woefully inadequate. I went back to my global marketing job on day 85 (ish) while my daughter was still hospitalized! She was in a hospital 15 miles north of my home; my office was 26 miles south of my home. Yeah....go ahead and imagine what my days and nights were like. Then there was the pumping of the breasts to get fresh milk to my fragile baby and the associated logistics of that endeavor!

I'll stop before I get into the five eye surgeries that took place AFTER I returned to work, and the medical evacuation flight on a Learjet to Michigan to attempt to save her retinas. In the end, her retinas mostly detached and she is blind for life barring some miracle of stem cell research. She is now 9 years old, has a hearing impairment, and a fluent reader of Braille who LOVES books. We detailed her NICU journey at www.babymilagro.org as it happened. It helped my hubby and I cope. She's also the older sister to two younger siblings who were (Thank God) born full term.

Anyway, without the paid leave, I would have lost/quit my job. Without my job that paid the \$1.5 million in hospital bills...well, I can't go there in my mind to imagine that. Nobody should have to go through hell like this. My German colleagues were incredulous that I was back at

work; they get what 2 years of paid leave? Thanks for taking this on. I'm usually proud to be an American, and a military veteran even. But when it comes to the topic of paid family leave/maternity leave, it's utterly embarrassing! Surely we can do better.

“Having that first year at home with my daughter was priceless... The fact that my job was there for me when the year was done made this possible.”

Mary Jane, Sacramento, CA

Tonia, Oakland, CA,

At the time I had my children (1987-1995) I worked for the State of California benefits was something called (NDI) Non Disability Insurance I received about \$13.00 per day while being off. If I had any vacation or sick leave I would have to use this first. This is a bad idea, because what if you hadn't built up a lot of this type of leave. Also, once it's used up when you return to work you have to build this time up again. Say you need to take a sick day with your baby you have to work at least one month before you can build up 8 hours worth of sick-leave. You can take off but, then you would be docked the 8hrs or so.

You know that your baby will need you in some point of time or

even an doctor's appointment. The State recently implemented State Disability and now a fee is taken out of our checks for this type of Insurance and I believe you can use this with Maternity Leave. I do believe that a paid leave of absence program should be put into place for All new Mothers and Fathers for a least (1) year of paid leave.

Janet, San Lorenzo, CA

Both my children are over 30, so this subject only applies to me as a very loving and involved grandmother. I had to watch both my daughter and daughter-in-law cry every day when they had to go back to work within weeks of the birth of their babies. This only adds to the incredible stress of having a baby, and all that surrounds it. It's intolerable.

Families today can't make it on just one salary, and the working mom is a given. But, please, our country needs to adopt a policy regarding family leave so that moms may stay home with their infants, at least for a while. It's heart-wrenching for the moms and for the babies.

Mary Jane, Sacramento, CA

Both my husband and I, as workers in the state of California, had six and eight weeks, respectively, of paid family leave after the birth of our daughter by c-section. Having this leave was huge to us, and allowed us to save for the even longer period of leave – one year with my job protected – that I was able to take as an employee of the state. Because our daughter was born 6 weeks early, I didn't get to work as long as we had expected. We were counting on that six weeks of salary to provide savings for the year that I took off work.

If we didn't have the pay provided by paid family leave, I would have had to return to work earlier

				X	X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	17	
18	19	20	21	22	23	24			
25	26	27	28	29	30				

U.S. WORKERS RECEIVE A MEDIAN OF ONLY 16 PAID DAYS OFF PER YEAR

WHICH IS NOT ENOUGH TIME TO RECOVER FROM CHILDBIRTH

The Effects of Paid Family and Medical Leave on Employment Stability and Economic Security. Heather Boushey and Sarah Jane Glynn, April 2012

than one year. I truly wished that our federal government valued parenthood more than it does. Having that first year at home with my daughter was priceless. It allowed me to breastfeed her for the entire year, provide the one-on-one attention that an infant needs, and established a strong bond between the two of us. The fact that my job was there for me when the year was done made this possible.

Philip, Mission Viejo, CA

Both of my sons were micro-preemies (under one pound) and in the NICU for months. Although the employers of my wife and my own were very understanding they offered no paid family leave for either of us. The hospitals that my sons were at were an hour or more away (depending on traffic). Both of us had to continue to work (even my wife after her medical leave for her C-section) so that we could pay our bills even though it limited our time with our sons as they fought for their lives. It was a tough three months for our first son and five months for our second son of constantly traveling to the hospital to visit.

Even after they were home, they both still required a high level of care, many doctors visits, occupation therapy and physical therapy appointments. We did receive some financial assistance from family and friends but additional financial assistance would have been very helpful so that our sons could have had more attention from us.

Lindsay, San Diego, CA

California's Paid Family Leave allowance meant that I did not have to put my daughter in daycare starting at 8 weeks of age. As a result I was able to continue breastfeeding her until she was 14 weeks old and I got the time my body needed to further recover from the pregnancy and labor. We are both healthier for it which means I am now a more-productive worker than I otherwise would have been.

Vicki, Eagle Rock, CA

Due to having a c-section for TWINS, I was able to get 12 full weeks of FMLA time. However, I wasn't ready to return to work after those first 12 weeks. We were still getting into a routine. So in order for me to remain out for 3 more months I borrowed against my 401k.

Upon returning to work I began paying back the money that I borrowed. What I didn't anticipate was being laid off my job, 3 months after I returned from my leave. Unfortunately, 3 payments didn't come close to what I had borrowed. I tried to continue making payments on my 401k loan, but eventually defaulted on it. I know that some countries offer a year's paid leave. It would have been nice to have had the whole first year with my newborns.

Ruth, Pomona, CA

Family values means NOT heaping real financial insecurity upon

new parents. Imagine: the loss of a job can be devastating, and the loss of 6-8 weeks of income can be a desperate situation. Must we lag behind most of the civilized world in our willingness to support society as well as business?

As a teacher, I was grateful to be able to cobble spring break onto my short maternity leave and to spend those early weeks learning how to be with my daughter and to establish breast-feeding. How very difficult for those who must lose their income or farm out the care of their newborn.

Suzanne, Mountain View, CA

FMLA was very helpful after the birth of both of my children. We receive health insurance through my job, so I wouldn't have been able to maintain our family's health insurance without it. Also, I am a pediatrician, and I care for children in the hospital.

Many families use FMLA to care for their children after serious accidents and illnesses, so it's not just for maternity leaves. It's very important for both moms and dads to have this federal protection to maintain their health insurance and their jobs when accidents and illnesses happen and when new babies are born.

Koni, Turlock, CA

For the first child, 18 years ago, I was a post-doc in a rather intensely competitive laboratory. I used three weeks of sick pay to cover my absence so I could recover from a C-section. I raced back to work to keep from losing my position – another post-doc had been hired in my three week absence. Since I was the sole bread winner, I had to get back to defend my bench space.

Twelve years ago, Child #2 came before I had obtained ten-



ure. Again, my job was in peril if I took time off. I got lucky and the birth was between terms. I had 5 whole weeks to recover from that unplanned C-section after a VBAC went horribly wrong.

Imagine teaching college level biochemistry to 100-150 students on sleep deprivation. I can barely remember how awful it was. At the time, I just did it. I wanted to keep my job and there really was no other choice.

Natalia, Castro Valley, CA

Having paid family leave allowed me to get to know my baby and my baby to know me. I got to establish a breastfeeding routine that created a life long bond between me and my baby. I got to have time to get used to being a mom which is not an easy task.

Tara, San Jose, CA

Having paid family leave allowed me to spend time with my children when they were born. With my son this meant being able to adjust to life with a newborn and breastfeed without the added pressure of my regular 40-hour a week job. With my daughter, it meant that I was the one who could cuddle her as she was swaddled in the billy blanket to treat the jaundice she came home from the hospital with. With family leave patched together with my vacation time I was able to spend the first 4 months of each of my children's lives at home.

I am sure that this time helped us grow and bond together and allowed us to set productive and rewarding routines that lasted far longer than these baby stages.

Sylvia, Santa Monica, CA

Having paid family leave was a blessing for me. My husband and I have 4 children and it would have been very hard to support our fam-

"I am both proud and grateful to live in a state where politicians don't just pay lip service to 'family values' but actually take action..."

Michael, Los Angeles, CA

ily with my husband's income alone. With me having c-sections and being out of work for a longer period of time, it was good to know that the paid family leave act was there for us.

Unfortunately I still had to dip into my vacation hours, but have the paid family leave really benefited our family. I think it's important to continue with the paid family leave, because it gives parents a chance to take time off of work and afford to stay home with their new bundle of joy, even if it's only for a few weeks.

Melissa, Los Angeles, CA

Having paid leave was essential for our family when my son was born. I was able to stay home for 12 weeks at 65% pay. Although it was not 100% pay, it enabled us to continue to pay the bills and especially to keep up with health care and health insurance costs when they were at their highest. Aside from this, the most important benefit was for me to have the chance to bond with my son and to establish a regular breastfeeding schedule.

Liz, Fairfax, CA

I am strongly in favor of family leave and think it is essential for

an civilized nation to provide support for mothers and fathers and infants in the beginning of life. For me I was lucky I guess. I had 12 weeks without pay but with a little money from state disability. But my husband was self employed and could take only 6 days off.

Still I was simply amazed how even having 12 weeks was not nearly enough!! As it was I went back to work exhausted at 12 weeks with a colicky baby who was bounced out of three day cares in 2 weeks. It was a sad and confusing time for our family, and one I deeply regret. We muddled through somehow. The dividends of well attached infants and happy healthy families can't be underestimated.

Michael, Los Angeles, CA

I always consider myself lucky to live in the great state of California and to call myself a Californian. This was more true than ever when my son was born in September 2005. California had recently created a paid family leave program, leading the nation as we so often do in California, and I was able to take six weeks of paid leave as my wife and I adjusted to our new roles as parents. I first took three weeks right when my son was born as we worked to find our feet and establish good parenting patterns and schedules.

My wife was able to take nearly 5 1/2 months using her maternity leave, paid family leave, comp-time, and vacation time. When it was time for her to return to her workplace, I was able to take another three weeks of leave to facilitate her transition back into the workforce and our son's transition into daycare. Even at six months, it felt early to be placing him into full time daycare – I can't imagine how parents do it after only one or two months.

I am both proud and grateful to live in a state where politicians

don't just pay lip service to 'family values' but actually take action and create programs which legitimately value families. All American families deserve lengthy and generous paid family leave.

Danielle, Sacramento, CA

I am a mother of one. I was going to be a mother of two. I lost my daughter in my 6 month of pregnancy. I gave birth to her naturally, so I got to have 6 weeks off just for having her. I want anyone who will listen that it is important to have that family leave. That 6 weeks wasn't long enough after her death. I didn't even have the FMLA on my side simply because I didn't work 7 hours or more. I had to take up all of my vacation and all of my sick for the school year, and the year isn't even out yet.

It's so important to have whether your having or grieving the loss of a baby you should still be entitled to it because you worked for it and you deserve it. Give mother's and father's there time with their children. They need that time with them. To bond with them, to learn them, to really appreciate there child as well as the child appreciating the parent. Let them have the time.

Ellen, Spring Valley, CA

I am a school teacher, and had to use my 6 weeks sick leave. When questioned our union rep. about not having maternity leave, I was told I got 6 weeks (he was referring to my sick leave). When I explained that I was NOT sick – I was having a baby, I wanted maternity leave, he told we I was lucky to get paid leave at all. My three girls are teenagers now, I hope to be retired by time I become a grandma primarily in the hopes of sparing my daughters the emotional strain of early child care issues.

I was heart-broken and stressed



MORE THAN 95 PERCENT OF WORKERS WHO TOOK LEAVE UNDER CALIFORNIA'S PAID FAMILY LEAVE INSURANCE PROGRAM RETURNED TO WORK AND MORE THAN 4 OUT OF 5 RETURNED TO THE SAME EMPLOYER

Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman, "Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California" (Washington: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2011); "Family Leave Insurance Benefits - General Information."

having to leave my babies. And with virtual strangers (no family in town) I am the insurance carrier and steady wage earner in my family, I had no choice but to return to work. And return with no sick leave left! With my third, I was to overwhelmed to go back to work at six weeks (three kids under 5), so I took an unpaid leave of absence and went on WIC. After seven years of college and a masters degree, how sad.

Laura, Los Angeles, CA

I am an adjunct college professor and I am going to be having my first baby in August. Since I am hired on a semester by semester basis I am considered a temporary employee. Which means when my baby is born in August I will not be on leave for the Fall semester, I simply will not be employed. I am scared to death about how I am going to cover those bills for that semester.

My only hope is getting disability, but I honestly don't know how long it is for nor how much I will get. All I can do now is work this last semester and then hope that somehow things are going to work out then.

Lindsay, Walnut Creek, CA

I am currently 21 weeks pregnant and I worry every day about what I am going to do when my daughter comes. My husband and

I just bought our first home, so I will definitely be returning to work after the baby comes. My husband has a Bachelor's degree and I hold a Master's degree. We both work full time, but we still don't make enough money for me to take off as much time as we feel is necessary after the birth of our child.

It's so important to me to be able to spend time with my baby when she first arrives, but I am afraid that it will be cut short due to financial reasons. I am lucky enough to get 12 weeks off of work, which I am grateful for, but this will not be paid. Between the percentage of my income I will receive from California state disability and the sick and vacation time I have save up (which is rapidly dwindling due to many prenatal care appointments), there will be at least 6 weeks in which I earn no income at all. That is assuming that all goes according to plan and I'm able to work right up to my due date. I don't know how we will fare without that income. I don't know what will happen if I have to take time off before the baby comes and don't have 12 full weeks with baby before I have to return to work.

Most childcare centers won't accept a baby less than three months old and I won't have anyone to care for her if I have to go back to work early. I am afraid that I won't be able to breastfeed her for the



recommended six months because going back to work so soon after her birth will interrupt our routine. My company is small and is not required to meet the breastfeeding laws and I'm afraid that I will have nowhere private to pump.

All the research that I have seen strongly states that more bonding time (and more breastfeeding time) has tremendous health benefits (both physical and emotional) for Mommy and baby. It is a travesty that America is so far behind the rest of the developed world in recognizing this. Pregnancy is supposed to be a time for mothers-to-be to prepare to care for their new children. It's been shown that stress is harmful to the fetus and yet so many of us spend so much time trying to figure out how we're going to make it once baby comes because we don't have the support we need. Please consider improving policies around maternal time off after giving birth. It will truly benefit everyone in the long run.

Elizabeth, Sacramento, CA

I am lucky that I was able to take advantage of the California Family Leave time as well as disability and some unpaid leave in order to stay home with my new baby for the first four months. I was able also to work from home part time to keep up with my work. My daughter, Payton, was a cluster feeder which required around the clock nursing. This would not have been possible if I was not at home to provide this important nutritional start for my daughter. Because I work at a small office I did have to cobble together some time and work while on leave but at least my office was willing to work with me.

This time should be extended and the Federal Leave options should be available to smaller businesses as well. Lastly, I work for a nonprofit organization where family leave benefits and flexible work arrangements should be a key focus. If legislators

DOUBLE WHAMMY



CAREGIVERS WHO LEAVE THE WORKFORCE TO CARE FOR THEIR FAMILY LOSE INCOME IN THE SHORT & LONG TERM

THEIR SOCIAL SECURITY RETIREMENT SUFFERS TOO

O'Leary, Ann. "Protecting Workers and Their Families with Paid Family Leave and Caregiving Credits: Why Social Security Should Guard Against 21st Century Economic Insecurities." April 2012

would do more to support this the world would be a better place. My moral for my organization is high due to their support of my leave. Feel free to contact me with any questions. I am happy to say I work for the League of Women Voters of California.

Kristin, San Carlos, CA

I am lucky to work for a community college that offers flexible hours and excellent benefits. Unfortunately, they handle maternity leave through accrued sick leave. I had just started my position 9 years ago when I became pregnant.

I had to come back to work too soon – after 6 weeks – which was still more time than many other families have. The consequences of this short leave time; my husband and I 'traded' off the baby. When I had classes, I dropped off the baby with him- at his job site as a general contractor! I still can't believe we did this. He left the baby inside one of the rooms not in construction, and looked in on her between banging nails and running

the circular saw. Because we were both working and sharing care as best we could, we got even less sleep than we would have otherwise. I suffered from severe postpartum OCD, a condition that was exacerbated by the short recovery time following a very difficult birth.

LaSandra, Santa Clara, CA

I am on my second pregnancy and am saddened by the fact that I don't have as much PTO as I did with my first and my time with my new baby will be cut short. My husband and I are looking at our finances to figure out if there's anyway we can afford for me to take any unpaid leave but it is unlikely. I love my job and want to be there but just want to be able to bond with my child before doing so – is that too much to ask?

Martha, Perris, CA

I could not see myself adapting to parenthood so easily without family leave. I had my first son on Oct. 20, 2010 through cesarian section. Although I was fortunate enough to have my mother and husband's support, it was up to me to wake up every other hour to feed my son and assure he was taken care of. I too was healing from my surgery and was able to go on light walks to help promote healing. I could not imagine having to worry about functioning through my day, caring for my newborn son, and having to also worry about jeopardizing my financial security because I would be on lack of pay. It is imperative that all women have the opportunity to heal physically, care for their newborns, and be able to do so without worrying that this may leave them homeless.

Dina, Encinitas, CA

I found out I was pregnant after a brief relationship with an unstable man. I was three months into a new

job, scared out of my wits and wishing I could go back to my former job where I had 10+ years tenure. If it had not been for Paid Family Leave, FMLA, Pregnancy Leave, Short-Term Disability – whatever you want to call it – I wouldn't have had the critical time to bond with my baby and still be able to provide for him.

I was luckier than most: I have a Master's Degree, a professional career, immediate and extended family close by to help, and worked for an employer larger than 50 people. I am sure my boss would have been happy to let me go, having four other women under him who were also pregnant with much longer tenures than I had. I was also lucky that I was pregnant in California, where the Paid Family Leave is up to 8 weeks longer than that of other states.

Had I known then what I do now, I wouldn't have worried every day that he was going to fire me because I was pregnant. I would have taken the longest leave possible which was my right to take and deal with the limited finances. My son is now 3 1/2 and I realize my time with him is very limited. Please ensure that all women, and men, are able to take Paid Family Leave. With all the layoffs and the economy in flux, family is all that some of us have.

Renée, Los Angeles, CA

I got luck that my union had just negotiated a month, instead of a week of paid leave (less than a year before my son arrived!). I was able to bank 2 more months of sick and vacation leave. As a single parent, I must say, I don't know what I could have done if I hadn't been able to jury-rig things. It's a shame that we don't have the same values of other nations, to support the care of our most precious and vulnerable.

Jennifer, Whittier, CA

I got paid family leave through the state of California for 6 weeks

and my husband was given the same benefits that could be used up until 1 year. So in total I took off 2 weeks prior to delivery on disability and used the 6 weeks after I was allowed on disability for having a vagina birth. I then immediately used my 6wks of paid family leave so I had a total of 12 weeks after birth of time off with my baby.

I wish I had longer but 3mos is better than nothing and I thought the pay I received while on it was more than reasonable to support my family. I had my job waiting for me when I returned and life at work picked up like I never left. I am pregnant with my second child now and plan on doing the exact same thing with my time off.

Jennifer, Oakland, CA

I got two months paid family leave. Those two months were great – it gave me time to bond with my baby and establish great routines for sleep and breastfeeding. I wish I could have had more! Two weeks was not enough time. When I went back to work, I had trouble maintaining my milk supply. I tried to make a more flexible schedule so that we did not need to pay for child care, but my manager was not understanding. I ended up quitting my job.

Elizabeth, San Francisco, CA

I had 2 months of paid leave, no duties, 3 months of paid 'reduced duties' allowing me to come to the office only once per week and not teach, and the usual summer off. All at full salary. Unfortunately, the 'reduced duties' quarter screwed up breastfeeding because I work so far from home, but that wasn't my employer's fault.

What I got from this generous maternity package was a child whom everyone has said, from day one, is marvelously secure, stable, and trusting, and who has

not had a major illness in her life (she is now 5). Word has it that in the old days at my institution, female professors were expected to show up and teach days after having given birth. I'm grateful to my older colleagues who pushed for reasonable maternity leave packages – without them, I would have chosen either not to have a child or to leave my profession. I am a lesbian and a feminist, but I believe infants are best off in the home with a parent for the first 6 months.

Tamara, Los Angeles, CA

I had 8 weeks of disability leave due to my C-section, and then had to take the remaining 4 weeks of my 12 week leave as unpaid due to the fact that I did not yet qualify for FMLA bc I hadn't been at my job for a year. As a new mom, I cannot imagine what would have happened if I'd had to go back to my job at 8 weeks – I was still recuperating from surgery, exhausted, and just starting to really understand how to take care of a baby.

I would have loved, loved, loved to stay home for another 2 months with my baby, but we needed the money. During my leave, we survived on my husband's paycheck alone by cutting back on a lot of spending, and we made it through, but we really could have used the money, especially because when I did go back to work, we had new bills for childcare.

Everything I've read said that bonding with a primary caretaker is of paramount importance in developing healthy attachment in newborns; if we lived in a country that allowed for longer, paid leave I really do feel it would have benefited my baby and made me a better mom.



Robin, Santa Barbara, CA

I had a C-section delivery of my son in 2009, and was self employed as an attorney at that time. I saved money to help cover costs post-birth, but needed to return to work after 4 weeks post-birth. Financially, I needed to generate income again to help support my family. My husband was working, but we are a 2 income family just to pay the regular monthly expenses. I took my son to work with me, but it quickly became counter-productive to try and work while he was there because he either needed to nurse or be held. While I became proficient at typing with 1 hand, it was difficult to talk on the phone to clients or opposing counsel, and meeting with clients or prospective clients was a challenge.

We couldn't afford child care until I was generating enough income to compensate for it. It was very stressful for us as a family during that transition time, and the lack of sleep did not help my working day. I was an emotional wreck from sleep deprivation and financial stress. I did not experience post-partum depression, just stress from the transition to our new life.

Had I been able to receive some financial benefit (I applied for it, but was not eligible since I was not employed by someone at that time) for at least 3 months post-birth my life would have been less stressful, and I would have enjoyed the time with my infant son more. Instead, I was consumed with how to juggle my work/income with his needs when I should have been focused solely on meeting his needs. We live very modestly and scaled back where we could on our expenses. I feel that I missed out on the first 6 months of my son's life because I was too worried about other factors, and while I was present with him for much of that, I wasn't really 'present' in the connected sense.

Wendy, Mill Valley, CA

I had absolutely no paid family leave. I had two children in less than two years and had no financial support of any kind apart from my husband.

On the other hand, his company had a 4 week paid leave policy for new fathers (in the first six months, so it didn't have to be consecutive weeks). Mothers at his company get much more time to be with their newborns. A minimum national standard is needed.

"Had I not received paid leave, I would still be recovering the from the financial damages."

Evelyn, Wingchester, CA

**Samantha,
Half Moon Bay, CA**

I had no paid maternity leave as a self employed mother. Thankfully, my husband was able to take one month paternity leave from his employment and be paid accordingly under California paternity law – to help care for our baby and myself. This required us to plan financially ahead for the entirety of our pregnancy and stay on a restrictive budget until my husband and myself returned to the office. Unfortunately after three months post partum I needed to return to the office due to financial need. I wasn't ready and neither was my nursing baby.

I am not a woman who is able to produce enough milk via breast pump, so this was an added stress for

both myself and my baby. We redesigned the office to include a nursery and hired a caregiver to bring our baby to me to nurse throughout the day from the age of 3 months to 3 years. Many years the amount I paid the caregiver out weighed the amount I was making. But we wanted our child near one parent as much as possible. The care and attention needed for mother and child are great, but to add to it the responsibility of providing financial support for your family is overwhelming.

Bottom line, if a mother wants to care for, breast feed, see her child throughout her work day, she must redesign her life. Without financial support for maternity leave and childcare and mother/home assistance provided by the government, we American women are placed under more stress than anyone else, particularly from the age of 0-3 years old of our children. Universal Health Care, 1-3 years maternity and paternity leave, government offered caregiving and homecare as well as additional time with your family are in place throughout Europe. America should take a look at how much healthier Europeans and their families are and learn from them beginning with paid family leave.

Tessa, Sebastopol, CA,

I had paid family leave through the university I worked for after the birth of both of my children. In both cases, this allowed me time to heal from delivery (I had emergency c-sections in both cases) and bond with my baby. The time at home also allowed me to get breastfeeding established and I was able to continue nursing my babies even after I returned to work.

In the case of my 2nd son, my time at home was even more necessary. He was born 1 month early and was barely 5lbs at birth. He spent nearly a week in the NICU due to complications. After coming home, it was critical that he feed regularly

in order to get his weight up. He was resistant to taking a bottle. If I had not been able to be at home for the first few months, I am not sure what we would have done – I was literally his lifeline to nourishment. After returning to work, my employer was flexible enough to let me leave early if there were days that he wasn't taking a bottle well at home. He is now a healthy 9 month old, eating well & growing well – the generosity of my employer has paid off and I am now back hard at work!

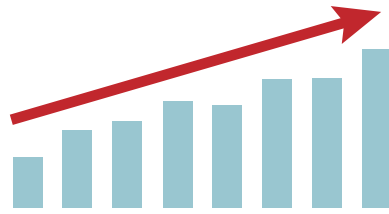
Because of my employer offering paid leave, I was able to get breastfeeding established with both babies – I nursed my first baby until he weaned at 14 months and am well on my way to doing the same (or similar) with baby #2. The current recommendation of pediatricians is that babies are breastfed for 6+ months – something that would be extremely challenging if mothers are not allowed time at home in the first few months to get breastfeeding established.

Crystal, Livermore, CA

I had the opportunity to take paid family leave, being a California resident, and I can't imagine having to go back to work any sooner than 12 weeks after having a baby. We as a nation should be thinking about the children whose development would be SO much more positive if we allow the natural bonding to take place between parent and child.

Holly, Los Angeles, CA

I had twins and thank goodness for family leave. Though only six weeks were 'paid,' and only partially so – I made about half my salary – it was hugely beneficial. My husband took it too. We don't have family nearby and were overwhelmed with the new responsibilities and it was a huge help not



PAID FAMILY LEAVE IS GOOD FOR THE ECONOMY

WOMEN WHO TAKE PAID LEAVE ARE 39% LESS LIKELY TO RECEIVE PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Linda Houser, PhD. "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public," A Report for the Center for Women and Work, January 2012

to have to worry about our jobs or money at that time.

Evelyn, Winchester, CA

I had two kids (now 9 and 4), the first one as a single mom. I can't imagine what I would have done without paid leave. I was one of the lucky ones. Had I not received paid leave, I would still be recovering from the financial damages. Every woman should have this benefits and the assurance that they won't be punished without pay or even a job, for bearing children.

Stephanie, Malibu, CA

I have four sons, three birth children and one adopted, and have experienced both paid and unpaid maternity leave. With my first son, living in Virginia, I had unpaid maternity leave for most of my leave from my job and my husband and

I had to take out student loans (he was in grad school) to make ends meet, which we are still paying back (our son is now 14 years old).

I was fortunate enough to have some form of paid maternity leave for our other three sons and I feel very blessed by that. We live in California now, one of the only states with a paid maternity leave program. I think about all of the families out there in the U.S. who have to struggle when they have a newborn- one of the most vulnerable times in a family's life.

We should be supporting our families and our mothers, not leaving them to fend for themselves. It is shameful that the U.S. is one of the most 'developed' countries but does not care for its own mothers and babies!!

Laura, Torrance, CA

I have to say that after the birth of each of my two sons, times were not only difficult because we were consistently sleep deprived and dealing with feedings, changings and colic, but I became unable to work. I am a photographer by trade and have my own small business.

When I don't work, I don't get paid. There is currently no paid leave for people like me. So to compound the stress of a new baby we were also dealing with a deficit in our income. Some European nations offer paid leave in addition to a government mandated 'nanny' of sorts that comes in to cook and clean house or watch your children during your family leave.

Why does a country as esteemed as the US not have something like this in place? Please consider offering assistance with a paid family leave to new mothers so we can continue to be the GOOD mothers we strive to be.



Joan, Los Angeles, CA,

I have two lovely girls – the oldest is 13 and the baby is 2. I had not had a baby in over 10 years and I was over 40. Not only could I have used more time for my new baby girl but it was harder on me this time around. Having more time to take care of me is the most important part to the puzzle. Without Mom being put back together there will be lost pieces. It took me a full year to get back to me. Thank God.... I'm back..... We have to remember that being pregnant and giving birth is not only physical but a mental state as well.

Anneli, Fairfax, CA

I have two small children and have never gotten paid maternity leave by any of my employers. I got disability which is only about half of your pay after the birth of my two babies. I do important work as a school counselor helping children and families through difficult times, yet when I needed support none was offered. I had to scramble and try to piece meal money together so we could get by on the bare minimum. This is not a healthy system for mothers and children.

After the birth of a child the last thing a new mom should be worried about is money. It is stressful enough! It adds undue stress and fear on the new mom just when she needs all her energy to bond with and take care of her new baby. I think it is so sad that there is no support for mothers and children in this country. Its pathetic actually that a country so rich would be so greedy and stingy with it's own mothers and children.

Andrea, Los Angeles, CA

I live in California and fortunately got 5 months of maternity leave. Not all of that leave was paid (full-pay) but I was lucky enough to

be in a financial position to have time with my daughter. This time was so important because it allowed us to bond. And although, I was sleep deprived, I was able to nap when she did and be with her all day and night and not feel like a total zombie.

I went back to work when she was in a regular routine and feel that time we spent in the beginning was essential to our development as a family. Being a working parent is hard. The first few months back to work were very hard on our family unit. Ideally, I would have loved to have a year off with my daughter, so I can only imagine the stress of those who have to go back after 6 or 8 weeks.

The other implication of family leave is the financial aspect. Some families have to go back to work right away (after 6 weeks) because they cannot afford the partial pay that maternity leave provides in some states. I am writing this because I feel that families need more time with their kids to develop healthy systems in the household. The more time parents can spend less stressed, the better it is for everyone in the family unit.

Jennifer, Whittier, CA

I live in California so fortunately I had Paid Family Leave for myself and my husband. I was very thankful for that to get 6 weeks off in addition of the 6 weeks of disability to bond and be with my my baby.

I am grateful to have been given that time off and still have my job protected but it would have been nice to have even more time off like the first 6 months to bond with baby and breast feed. I think it is too hard to pump and continue breastfeeding while working because of the time constraints involved. If I could be at home longer with my baby I would have breast fed longer instead of stopping as soon as I began working

like so many women do. Pumping is not easy and is a major hassle while you are working.

Even though work places are supposed to be accommodating to women who are pumping at work most are not. There is not a private place to do it and women are forced to give up pumping and breast feeding or resort to do it in there cars or public restrooms that aren't private or sanitary. I think the government needs to take that into consideration in the Paid Family Leave for new mothers to get a total of 18 weeks off after disability time in order to breast feed and bond with their new baby.

Donna, Granada Hills, CA

I only had a six-week maternity leave when my daughter was born, so it's a good thing I went into labor on the second day of my leave. It was a C-section, so I needed the entire time for recovery, and didn't get the go-ahead to drive until the week before I had to go back to work.

Living on disability during that period was rough – there were so many extra expenses but no usual paycheck to cover them. Yes, we knew it would be that way and yes, we planned for it – but it would have been better for my baby and my family if I hadn't HAD to go back to work so soon after she was born.

My husband is from the UK, and I looked on in envy at friends living there, who could take off for almost an entire year if they wanted, with benefits and help (social workers who came to visit the house to see how mother and child were doing). I feel like our politicians all talk about family values but it's just lip service – if they really believed in the importance of family, our society would make it a priority to support working parents.

Holly, McKinleyville, CA

I took Family Leave when I was pregnant with my son, but because I had not worked at that specific job for 12 months, I was not afforded PAID leave. I also was not able to keep my health insurance, so when I had my baby, I had to go on Cobra (which was ridiculously expensive) or switch to my husbands insurance, which was also expensive and did not cover a lot of my hospital expenses. It was terrible.

I thought Maternity Leave would afford me with some pay, and health insurance and it couldn't give me either. It was so stressful and the LAST thing we wanted to be dealing with during the last few months of pregnancy and the birth of our first baby.

Larry, S. Lake Tahoe, CA

I took in my four year old nephew in when my sister died. My paid leave allowed me to drive to Southern California from Lake Tahoe to pick my nephew up.

It allowed me to spend several days dealing with CPS and time to acclimate my nephew to his new life and home in Tahoe, spend time bonding with him, as well as time to locate child care. Without it the transition wouldn't have been as smooth and my nephew wouldn't of transitioned as well.

Mara, Santa Cruz, CA

I was able to be at home after the birth of our baby and I feel that it was key to my survival and to the physical and emotional health of me and my baby. Childbirth is exhausting and so is the care of a newborn. I needed that downtime to keep up my reserves of strength while seeing to my baby's needs as well. It was very important to have time to enjoy and bond with my daughter.

Our relationship got off to a very good start and has continued to be excellent and my daughter is now

MATERNITY LEAVE INCREASES BREASTFEEDING

MEDICAL AUTHORITIES RECOMMEND BABIES BE BREASTFED EXCLUSIVELY FOR 6 MONTHS BUT LESS THAN 14% OF MOMS HIT THAT GOAL



➔ BREASTFEEDING AFFECTS THE LONG-TERM HEALTH OF MOM & BABY

Centers for Disease Control, Breastfeeding Report Card—United States 2010

a successful college student with good values and a stable personality. Beginnings are very important. I wish that every mother and father and baby could have the advantage of such a beginning. Please do what you can to support family leave after childbirth.

Kasandra, Manteca, CA

I was able to take 14 weeks partially paid postpartum. My husband took the whole 12 weeks but was only paid for 6. We have lost so much do to our decrease in income just so we could give our daughter what she needs for as long as possible. This time allowed me to breastfeed for over a year.

Marie, Brentwood, CA

I was fortunate at the time my son was born to have a good paying job and receive Paid Family Leave while my son's father was in the military. It crushed me to have to return to work when my son was not even 4 months old but because of PFL at least I was able to take the little time offered.

Rosemary, Hawthorne, CA

I was grateful for the Family Medical Leave Act. There were several instances when it benefited me. My late husband had Diabetes and

several other medical issues. He'd had strokes, congested heart failure and numerous issues. Prior to learning about FMLA I would use up my vacation time to care for him in time of crisis. I could not always get vacation time from my employer so this would sometimes result in additional stress.

Once I learned about FMLA, although I still had the stress of figuring out how I would manage finances since I was not paid, I was at least able to care for my husband who was constantly being admitted to the hospital. Before he passed in 2002, he had had strokes, several heart attacks, and amputations, above and below the knee on his left side, and eventually lost his right leg and became a double amputee.

Additionally, several years ago I was home alone and had an Asthma attack that started at work. I did not know what was happening at the time. I was fortunate to be speaking to my daughter on the phone when I went into a full blow attack; although she was several hours away, she called 911, and paramedics arrived and rushed me to a near by hospital. I was hospitalized for several days and was able to use FMLA that week until I recuperated. This time I was paid by my employer as well. In both cases FMLA was a life saver for me.



Julie, Ladera Ranch, CA

I was lucky enough to have paid maternity leave when my son was born. I had to go out on leave about 4 weeks before he was due because he was growing poorly. I was able to relax before his delivery, which probably gave him enough time to mature to full term. He was born by C-section, which gave me automatic 8 weeks of paid leave. With the surgery and a new baby, I definitely needed that time to heal and to nurture my baby.

My husband was wonderfully helpful, but he couldn't breast feed every few hours at night. More amazing than that was the next two months of paid leave from the university at which I worked. I was able to breast feed, to watch his first smile and laugh, to be there when he rolled over and sat up, without the loss of a job. When I returned, the first quarter after my leave was over I had only administrative duties, no teaching required, again giving me time with my infant.

Watching my son thrive for several months was a joyful experience that I would wish for all new mothers. Knowing that I was being paid and that my job was waiting for me when I returned was key.

Kathy, Los Altos, CA

I was lucky that when I had my two children (now ages 12 and 7), I had decent family leave – by US standards. Of course I worked for a German company and I was shocked when I found out how much paid family leave moms get over there! We didn't get anything like that!

Even getting 11 weeks of paid leave after my first was born, it was incredibly hard to go back to work. If I could do one thing over in my life, it would be to recapture that time I lost with him as a newborn.

But now I work for a small company, and my boss' secretary is pregnant. She is now discovering how little paid leave and job protection she will get, and I think it is just WRONG!

Lissa, Culver City, CA

I was self-employed with my first son, and naturally that meant no paid leave. I remember pushing my baby in his secondhand stroller, keeping an eagle eye on the gutter in case there were any coins there: a windfall might mean I could afford to eat something for dinner. On recycling day I was up at dawn, pawing through other people's bins to find coupons because I couldn't afford a subscription to the newspaper. I spent the only free

“Watching my son thrive for several months was a joyful experience that I would wish for all new mothers.”

Julie, Ladera Ranch, CA

minutes I had in the day, those precious few minutes of naptime, comparing grocery flier bargains with the coupons I'd been able to scavenge, and did all of my shopping on double coupon days. We ate dandelion greens, we attended lots of library lectures with free refreshments, we made it through. Barely. (Without WIC, I doubt we would have.)

By the time my second son came along, I had found work

as an elementary school teacher. However, I was only part time and did not yet have maternity benefits. Fortunately my son was born during Thanksgiving break, and the school was understanding and sympathetic. I took unpaid 'sick' leave between Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks, and when school resumed January 3rd, I was there, with my one-month-old baby on my back. I nursed him in the supply closet between classes. I hemorrhaged a little and lost weight and never fully regained my health in the year that followed. But what choice did I have? My children needed me to work. I could not afford to lose my job.

And I was not about to join the ranks of the welfare moms, not when there was a job I could do, with supervisors humane enough to 'let' me bring my child along that all-important first year. Childcare would have cost more than what I made! Let's step back from politics and budgets for a moment here and just look at the question we are asking: Is it a good idea for newborn babies to have warmth, food and the presences of their mother? Well, duh. So just what is the problem here? This is fundamental stuff, folks. We have to take care of the mothers if we want the babies taken care of. And we have to take care of the babies if we want the species to continue. End of story.

Keri, Los Angeles, CA

I was the major breadwinner in my family before I had my first daughter. Needless to say, that had to change after her birth. It was a financial struggle and the source of much stress around what was supposed to be the happiest time in our lives. At the same time, my best friend in Sweden had had a baby a month prior. Her experience was altogether different due in part to

Sweden's maternal (and paternal!) leave programs. I was so jealous at what seemed to be the most common sense support. This is our country's future, and its security is made up in part by the solid foundations of it's families.

Louise, Carson, CA

I was very ill after our baby was born, and he had terrible colic. My husband was working delivering pizzas, and he had to stay home with us a lot, so money was tight. I don't know what we would have done if we had to worry because I didn't have paid leave!

Joanna, Glendale, CA

I was working at an unsustainable pace at a fashion company when I got pregnant. I spent my first trimester working 10-12 hour days, five days a week. My husband is a freelance producer, who thankfully qualified for health benefits, which were much better than the ones my very cheap employer offered. I quit my job and spent most of my pregnancy working from home, freelancing myself, but not with a steady income.

The baby came right on time, and my husband just happened to not get any work for 5 weeks. It was such a blessing for me to have him home with me for that long. Two weeks of having your husband close by helping is not nearly long enough. Women need at least two weeks for the recovery pains of labor to subside, if not three. And we had no pain leave because we work for ourselves. But thankfully my mom came for a couple weeks to help us. By two months, I had to start working again because opportunities came up that I couldn't turn down.

Even though I work from home, it's been very hard. My baby is breastfed exclusively, so I get 2-3 hour windows when I can work, if I can work. I wish I could have taken another month off at least. Having that ex-

tra cushion of time to get to learn how to be a mom and take care of my body/mind and my babies needs would've been so helpful. Now I'm faced with the reality that I have to figure out some sort of childcare. It seems preposterous to send my baby away if I work from home. I hope to find a nanny I can share with another family.

Cherrise, Bodega Bay, CA

I worked for the University of California when giving birth to my two daughters. We had the option of buying into an insurance plan which paid you up to 70% of your salary after the allowed 6-8 weeks maternity leave. UC did not give paid leave, but your position was secure and your health insurance was paid, which is a huge relief. I went back to work at 4 mos with both of my daughters, but I quit 2 weeks later after my last child was born.

It was so worth it to be home with my children, and has made a huge difference in all of our lives. What would have been a huge help would have been if my husband had not been laid off from his job 6 mos later which left us with no benefits and no money! Yeah, who knew when giving up a great job the economy was going to go down the drain?

Berta, Palm Desert, CA

I'm a mother of 3 children, 16, 8 and 6. I came to United States 19 years ago with not family but my husband. When my first and second child were born I had to leave both of them under the babysitter's care at 3 months of age. This is so hard especially when the one taking care of your loved ones are not even relatives. When my son was born I was given only 6 weeks to be with him. My employeer requested me to return to work. I couldn't leave my 6 week old baby. I was

not ready emotionally or physically (according to the doctor I was fine) ready to go back to work. I was informed that I have the option of requesting time off throught the Family Leave Act. I requested 6 more weeks to be at home with my son. This time was granted to me but with no pay.

It was hard to adjust to a one salary for those 6 weeks having an extra expense with the arrival of my third son. I was grateful to have the opportunity to stay home for 6 weeks. However, I did not received my salary and I also lost a year of retirement for being absent for 3 months. I would like for you to be more considered of women that are not only mothers but housewives, workers and many more roles that we have to play in a daily basis.

Stephanie, Folsom, CA

I'm lucky to live in California, where we both from short-term disability and paid family leave. I was able to get paid, at 55% of my salary for 13 weeks (this included three weeks before my due date). My employer also paid out my sick and vacation leave, so I was more or less paid full-time for much of my maternity leave.

I was, luckily, financially able to use an additional four weeks of maternity leave unpaid, but I know not many new mothers are able to shoulder that burden. My PFL was an absolute blessing. I was able to exclusively breastfeed for three months, before I went back to work, after which time I had to supplement with formula as I could not pump what my baby required. In other countries, like Canada, you can be on PFL for a year. I'm not sure I would want a full year off from my job, but definitely more than the four months I took off.

I cannot imagine the mothers



who must return to work at 6 weeks because that is all the time they're allowed. At six weeks, I was still only barely recovered from giving birth, along with being completely sleep-deprived. I think my employer and California's PFL is a testament to why every single woman who has given birth in the past three years (and that is about more than a dozen women in our office) have returned to work. If the environment was less family friendly, many women would have quit, I'm sure.

Mila, Oakland, CA

I'm owner of a small residential design and construction company and feel that allowing for flexibility in paid family leave is crucial for building healthy, happy families. We support our staff with a modest paid family whether it is for welcoming newborn children into their families or caring for ill or aging parents.

There are realities to the human experience that we can support each other through and I've found that supporting my staff in this way builds loyalty and boosts productivity. I support initiatives for insurance for paid family leave as companies like mine could develop our employee benefits further and balance the financial impact that family leave weighs on either the employer or the employee.

Shannon, Los Altos, CA

I've been fortunate to be able to quit my job to care for our baby. I now realize the importance of a child having a consistent caretaker, preferably the mother, for breastfeeding and healthy psychological and emotional development. On a practical level, caring for a child is a demanding 24 hour job. The first 2 months I could not have survived without the help of my husband and family members.

I cannot imagine having to go

STUDIES SHOW THAT PAID FAMILY LEAVE AFTER THE BIRTH OF A CHILD COMBATS POVERTY

Sakiko Tanaka, "Parental Leave and Child Health Across OECD Countries," *Economic Journal* 115, no. 501 (2005) & Waldfogel, Jane "Understanding the 'Family Gap' in Pay for Women with Children," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, no. 1 (1998), 137-156

back to work when my baby was under a year old, let alone after 6 weeks or even sooner, but I know if I was not as financially privileged I would have to. This is incredibly harmful for the whole family but especially the child.

We need to invest more in our families as they are the foundation of our society and the reason most of us work in the first place. It is shocking to me how far behind the US is in paid maternity and family leave compared to most European countries. We need to think about our priorities and not force mothers to go back to work during the most critical weeks, months, and years of their children's lives.

Heather, Santa Paula, CA

I'm on maternity leave now. Unpaid, but luckily I got 60% of my pay from CA's SDI. Just enough to make it extremely difficult for us, but not impossible. Along with the rest of the concerns about our new baby, our lack of sleep, general life stress, we are fighting about money.

Paid leave should be a given nationally for companies bigger than 15 employees or so for a month at least! It's ridiculous what we go through as women to have children for our families, our country, and how little those children are respected in this country. It's just another extension of what we think of children in this country.

Lisa, El Cerrito, CA

I was very lucky to have paid leave through a combination of accumulated vacation days and disability insurance.

Without paid leave, my family would not own a home, I probably would not have a job, at least not a full time job, and we would all be much poorer. I am the main breadwinner of our family. My husband works but makes less than half my salary. I carry the health insurance for all of us (self, husband and two kids under six). Paid leave also makes up for the loss in calculated social security income. I am still 'behind' and when I hope to retire, my benefits will be calculated at a lower rate because I took 'time off'. Maternity leave is not vacation. It is important bonding time, time to rest and heal from a difficulty pregnancy or birth, to establish routines to get the day going when work starts again.

I hope that policy makers realized the shortsightedness of putting the economic burden of childbearing and childrearing solely on the parent or parents. The child starts behind in terms of health and economic security. This puts the parent behind and thus, it puts our society behind.

Roseann, Huntington Beach, CA

In 2003, I was laid off from my job during my pregnancy and was received unemployment payments.

I was really lucky, because on the last day of my unemployment benefits, my disability (SDI) became effective. I was then notified by EDD that I was eligible for the California State Family Leave benefit. I was really excited to have an additional 6 weeks to spend time with my baby. Having been unemployed during the pregnancy, it was very difficult to find employment. It was a very stressful time for my husband and I.

In Orange County, CA, two wage middle income earners are a necessity to own a home. We had been saving for years. I knew that I had to find a job and enter the workforce. This was a not an easy decision to make. Was it really worth it, to find a job earning less than I was earning before I was working, and then pay for full-day infant care at approximately \$9,000 a year? It was if we wanted to own our home and live the American Dream. In addition to the stress of not knowing how we would get by financially on one paycheck, I was also having some moderate post-partum issues after the baby was born.

Having a paid family leave system is a necessary benefit for families caring for children or loved ones because it provides the piece of mind knowing that you can take the time necessary to care for your child or ill loved one. It is also a benefit for the economy, because there is extra money available to by goods and services needed to sustain life.

I was lucky. I had my husband's income to keep us going. Some women are not. Their husband may have died or she and the baby may have had to leave the home, due to domestic violence or unsafe conditions. I believe that if you have worked and contributed tax dollars, there should be benefits available for the time you were working.

Deirdre, Camarillo, CA

In 2004, my husband and I had a 3 year old daughter, and thought

that it was time for a second child. As luck will have it, I conceived spontaneous triplets. No fertility drugs or interventional procedures were used. There was no way to 'predict' this would happen: there is no history of multiples in my family, I don't have PCOS or any other fertility issues, and I was not of advanced maternal age. It was simply one of those things – I dropped three eggs that fertilization cycle and we hit the fertility jackpot.

“Without paid leave, my family would not own a home, I probably would not have a job... and we would all be much poorer.”

Lisa, El Cerrito, CA

Fortunately, I work for a pharmaceutical company that has excellent benefits, and a generous leave policy. I was put on limited bed-rest at 22 weeks, and full bed-rest at 29 weeks. In July, 2005, I delivered 3 healthy babies at 34 weeks. But, they did have to spend time in the NICU for 'feeding and growing.' Our NICU was 20 minutes from home, and our older daughter had just turned 4. We had some family in the area, but no one was prepared to handle all of these tiny babies.

Thankfully, because we live in California, my husband was able to take FMLA. His eight weeks home were vital to our family. Shuttling back and forth to the hospital, then caring for one baby, then 2 babies, then all 3 babies at home would

have been literally impossible if he was working. By the time he returned after 8 weeks, we were on a solid routine with the babies, that continued throughout their infancy. I returned to work 12 weeks after their birth, and my company let me transition part-time for another 6 weeks after that. Even though this was quite generous by most standards, the hardest part was the reduced pay. We incurred thousands of dollars in debt the first 6 months of the triplets' lives between reduced pay, childcare expenses for my older daughter, and just day-to-day care and feeding for an instant family of 6.

We didn't plan on having 3 babies at once, so obviously didn't save for them. I was on long-term disability for much of my leave, but it was not at full pay. The final 4 weeks I was home with babies were protected, but no pay. My husband's FMLA was also under reduced pay. I am happy to say, though, that we survived. They thrived, and I now have 3 happy, healthy, active kindergarteners, and after 5 years we are finally seeing the end of our debt. I am one of the lucky ones. It could have been so much worse.

Tara, Albany, CA

In order to stay home with my newborn son 10 years ago, I relied on state disability (I had a cesarean) and cobbled together sick and vacation days from work. When I returned, exhausted from new baby care, I had 3 sick days and no vacation days in my 'bank.' I was lucky.

My husband took a partial sabbatical so he could stay home when the baby was sick. Otherwise, I would have had to take leave without pay. Please support paid family leave for new mothers. I was one of the lucky ones and having to return to work with an infant was



still the hardest thing I have ever had to do. I can only imagine how horrible it must be for women who aren't so lucky.

Collette, Auburn, CA

It is a challenging adjustment when a baby is born and it takes longer than 12 weeks to get it figured out. Parents should have the time and energy away from a job to do this. My older child needed me constantly and I was lucky enough to be able to stay home longer than 12 weeks. However I gave up my job to be able to do this and not all parents can.

Margaret, Oakland, CA

I wish I had paid family leave when I had my second child. I requested 3 months of unpaid leave, which had never been requested before from any other employee (paid was not an option). After less than 2 months off, I was told I could have no more time since I was being treated differently than the other employees (who had not just given birth). It was very stressful.

To stay employed, I returned to work at the 2 month mark with only a week's notice, unable to pump enough to keep my baby fed. I don't have an office that I go to, I drive from client to client and so I used that time, while driving on the freeway, to pump milk. Yes, I drove at 70 miles an hour attached to a breast pump. I was desperate. I still could not pump enough to keep my child fed. For any of you wondering why I didn't switch to formula, it turned out my baby was allergic to everything other than breast milk. This is not an exaggeration, this was life or death.

I was lucky in that I found a Milk Bank to supplement my supply and paid \$3/oz for milk. I spent around \$1000 a month for supplemental milk to keep my baby fed until he

was 16 months old. I could not afford to quite my job, we would have lost our home. I can't imagine what it would have been like to have not only had proper family leave, but paid leave to get off to a good start. I could have banked away milk needed, I could have prepared for the work to come and proper scheduling. Our family could have been far less stressed and less financially drained.

"After less than 2 months off, I was told I could have no more time since I was being treated differently than the other employees (who had not just given birth)."

Margaret, Oakland, CA

Kim, Albany, CA

Like so many new moms, when I had my first child, I was sleep deprived, went on days without showering and didn't have a very good appetite to keep my energy level up. Taking care of a newborn is extremely hard work. We didn't have any family nearby so getting help from that area was not possible. Luckily we have really good friends that brought us dinner and occasionally sat for the baby while mom and dad could get a couple hours of zzzzs.

I can't stress enough how important it is to have paid family leave. Without it, our financial situation would be in a hardship.

I used all of my vacation days and sick days from work when I went on maternity leave. I also took off an addition month and a half because I just physically and mentally was not able to be productive as an employee. It was far better for me and my baby to get the rest and recovery time we both needed before getting back into the normal swing of things (if that actually really happens).

Rebecca, Santa Clarita, CA

Lucky definitely describes the work support I've been given as I started my family. In California, we have 6 weeks of paid disability for new moms + 6 weeks of paid family leave. In addition, the law allows us to 'bank' our vacation time so that we can extend our leave. For each of my two children, we didn't set foot in daycare until breastfeeding was established and the critical first 3 months had passed.

More importantly, my husband is a trucker who spends time on the road to help us survive. California allows him 6 weeks of paid bonding as well. My first son didn't benefit – and his relationship with his daddy is much less secure than my second, who had time to grow a firm attachment. My husband is happier, too, as he feels that we are more established as a family after bonding.

Without family leave, I wouldn't have achieved the full year of breastfeeding recommended by the CDC and AAP. I would have left my infants before they were ready to play independently. They would not have had time to spend with their trucker daddy who is here one day and gone the next. In general, we would be less bonded, less healthy, and much less committed to a state and job that made our family a priority. Americans shouldn't have to choose between their finances and

their infants. Babies need to be home, where they can be free of illness and held/breastfed as much as they need, during those crucial first few months.

Hilary, North Hills, CA

My baby boy arrived 2 months early. Without the support of paid family leave there would have been no way I could have afforded to take that amount of work off. With the support of those funds I was able to be at the hospital at 6:30 am for the first doctor's rounds and participate in my premature baby's medical care. Research shows that 'kangaroo care' helps premature babies develop faster and stay healthier. You can only do this if you're there in the hospital. I'm so grateful for the financial support that made it possible for me to be there!

Sara, Redding, CA

My baby is 6 weeks old today and we are still working hard to establish a breastfeeding routine. She had a setback with tortacolis, which was stressful for both of us and made the breastfeeding routine even more difficult. I am so thankful for my paid leave. I couldn't imagine going back to work if I only had 6 weeks off. My husband had 4 weeks off, which was so helpful especially because I had a c-section and again with the diagnosis and doc pats due to tortacolis. We are forever grateful for our paid leave!!

Rhiannon, Poway, CA

My daughter suffered two strokes right after her birth, and subsequently had uncontrollable seizures for the first two days of her life. She spent her first week in the NICU, and was on medication until she was 19 months old to prevent seizures. I am lucky to live in California, which does offer some limited paid family leave after the birth of

a child. I am also lucky that when I had my child, I worked for a company that allowed paid maternity leave both before and after birth.

When I returned to work after my maternity leave ended, my husband was able to take paid family leave for his bonding time with our daughter, at partial pay. Having paid family leave enabled us to care for her like no one but her parents could. It enabled us to bond with her and watch over her and give her the best care possible during that critical time. It is unconscionable that today in the United States, the wealthiest country in the world, not every mother (or father) has the right to paid leave after the birth (or adoption) of a child.

Christine, San Francisco, CA

My early days home with Isabella were blessed with tiny miracles. I was lucky to see her unfold and blossom. But luck should have nothing to do with it – every family needs parental leave in this critical bonding time of discovery and wonder. So if you profess family values, live them: value families with paid parental leave for all new parents.

Dina, Citrus Heights, CA

I and my family have had to use vacation and sick leave to take care of family members. We as a progressive country should take better care of our family and the family fabric. In Argentina and Sweden, these countries pay their mothers to take of their babies (and not call it welfare) and other family members. We are too behind the human grid and there is no excuse not to take care of what is most precious, OUR FAMILIES!

Ina, Sunnyvale, CA

My husband and I were both working up until my due date. However, the pregnancy was com-

plicated (I had to work while on bed rest), delivery was a mess, and my son ended up in the hospital for four days after birth and I had lost so much blood that I was ordered to rest for 12 more weeks!

We have no family where we live, and had no one to rely on full time. Thank goodness my husband had paid leave! I was a contractor and couldn't do any new work; his paid leave kept us going while my son and I recovered. This was my son's life – and mine – on the line. Please make sure all families have the option to stay at home and make sure that their kids are taken good care of after birth.

Martina, Santa Cruz, CA

My patients who are new mothers are trying to nurse their babies, and it is a 24/7 job, which is pretty exhausting, especially if the work they do is physically heavy. Being up at night, and then having to work the next day, many moms lose their milk supplies before the baby is 2 months old.

The old rules for maternity leave were 8 weeks for a C-Section and 6 weeks for a vaginal delivery, but this did not have to do with babies' needs – it was for the time needed for the uterus and vagina to heal. What needs to happen for all moms in the country to be able to have enough down-time to successfully nurse is that they should get at least 12 weeks of leave – my own preference is 20 weeks. WHY?? Because the American Academy of Pediatrics has stated that babies should be breastfed exclusively to 20 weeks, and then gradually add foods. If a mom were off work that long, the family would be more stable, as she could rest when the baby sleeps, and keep her milk supply up. It has been shown that babies have less illness and less hospitalizations when fed on demand.



Fathers need time with babies too. But the mom needs time to recuperate and keep up the milk supply, as well as to bond with the child psychologically, and help build basic trust. In every state, this petition should be made, to give moms 20 weeks of paid disability leave. If women only have 2 children, let them have this small amount of time out of their working life, to be able to get their babies started off right!

Megan, Sacramento, CA

My son was born last May and he is my boyfriend and I's first child. We had recently bought a house and taking unpaid time off would not have been an option. Luckily I did receive paid time off and the transition from an apartment couple to home owning parents wasn't the stress it would have been without it.

Amazingly my boyfriend also receive paid leave and for the first 3 weeks of our sons life he was home to help. And although I was still crazy exhausted I can't imagine not having him there to help me with all the new parent stuff I would have freaked out trying to do myself. By the time he went back to work I felt more confident that baby and I would make it through the day. We are so lucky.

Julie, San Francisco, CA

My twins are now 22. When I had them there was no paid or unpaid maternity leave...there was 'disability leave' as though having a baby were a medical condition!

My twins were premature and I had a high risk pregnancy. Once they were born I was supposed to return to work after a couple of weeks when the disability leave ended...I tried to negotiate a part time position but was unsuccessful. So I quit, because I couldn't manage preemie twins and a full time job. I tried to get unemployment because I didn't have a choice...I



THOSE EARNING THE LEAST IN OUR ECONOMY – THE YOUNG, LESS EDUCATED, PEOPLE OF COLOR – ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE TO LEAVE THEIR JOBS AND EXPERIENCE A WAGE-DROP AFTER CHANGING EMPLOYERS

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2010 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010), available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpswom2010.pdf>

had to quit to take care of my twins. However, my claim was denied.

How much better my situation would have been if there had been paid maternity leave, and the option for part time work. I was thrilled when maternity/paternity leaves were instituted in CA...but they should be paid, like everywhere else!

Peter, Whittier, CA

My wife had Paid Maternity Leave at her job as a CNA. She spent the last 30 days of her pregnancy in the hospital due to complications and had paid leave then. Even then she still had paid leave after the birth, but suffered complications with a hernia afterwards... and was subsequently terminated.

Luckily within the year she was able to get a CNA job at another hospital that was part of the hospital network of the previous one. She actually likes working at the new one better. But still, compared to other developed countries our Paid Maternity Leave program is so conservative as to be niggardly.

Amy, San Francisco, CA

Neither my husband nor I had paid family leave after giving birth to our daughter, and as a result, my

family incurred more than \$10,000 of debt just to pay our bills so I could stay home and care for our newborn. As a full-time teacher, now divorced, I am still trying to pay off this debt ten years later. The sacrifice was worth it for the benefit of my child, but I didn't expect it to have such a long-term impact on my financial stability.

Robin, Santa Barbara, CA

NOT having a paid family leave act after the birth of our son impacted my husband and I significantly and in different ways. I am a self-employed attorney, and did not have the benefit of an employer who could help pay the maternity leave costs, nor was I eligible for disability for same reason.

I had a C-section delivery, and because of financial necessity I had to return to work 4 weeks post-birth (part-time at first). This was physically challenging, to say the least, and did slow my recovery a bit because I needed to be mobile and not resting. As we couldn't afford any childcare at that time I took my son with me to work, which presented it's own set of challenges.

My husband would have loved to stay with our son while I went to work, but because our health in-

insurance was through his employer, and we were relying heavily on his employment he was not able to take anything more than a week's vacation time to help after the birth. We didn't dare use all of his sick days since we didn't know if he would need to use them down the road. Our son was born in March 2009.

Patricia, San Pablo, CA

Only being able to spend the minimum amount of time disability allows with my new born twins has been the hardest thing I have EVER done in my life. Being the head of the household I had no choice, to this day it sadness me that I had to leave them so young to be taken care of by someone else. It is a hard reality each women in American have to face upon pregnancy which is suppose to be the best time in a women's life. Worrying about whether our jobs will be secure upon return should not be in the list of a new parent's reality!

Heidi, San Diego, CA

Our experience isn't much different than it is for many. I work for the State of California, yet I get one paid day of maternity leave. That didn't even cover the 3 days I was in labor for my last child. The rest of my shortened maternity leave was covered by half-pay family medical leave.

We are expecting again, so we are saving up as much vacation and sick time as we can, in addition to as much money as we can, to cover what will hopefully be a full 6 weeks of leave. But I work part time now, and I will only be getting paid half of my salary during that time. My husband and I will be staggering our family medical leave so that we are not both getting paid half salary during the same time, which means he won't get as much early bonding time.

Kim, Simi Valley, CA

Our first son required surgery at 2 1/2 weeks and even though it was a simple procedure, he experienced a lot of discomfort in his early life and sleep was non-existent for my husband and I for the first 6 months. At the time, I worked for The Walt Disney Company and they had probably the best maternity leave policy possible. I was able to get my full pay for the 10 weeks I was on leave between disability and a salaried continuance program that I was eligible for that allowed me to stockpile my sick/vacation days.

But even though I was granted an additional 2 weeks due to delivery complications, 10 weeks was not enough time especially given my circumstances. Parents should be allowed to spend a minimum of 14 weeks with their newborn children. I will never forget my first day back at work, I was so sleep deprived and my brain was fuzzy and I was distracted, not to mention how heartbroken I was to be away from our son for 8-10 hours a day. I can't imagine what it would have been like to not get paid during this time and to have had that added stress on our financial situation.

Mariena, Culver City, CA

Paid Family Leave is extremely important to me. I spent three months with my son after he was born and it allowed me to establish breastfeeding and bond with him as well as adjust to my new life. To spend three months at home I had to go about a confusing process with my human resources department and a 3rd party company to use disability leave, family medical leave, etc. I received paychecks from 2-3 places some of which were taxed and some of which were not taxed. It was difficult to understand in advance how much of my vacation time I would need to use in order to stay at home for

three months and if I would have enough.

This process needs to be simplified and those who have not been with a company for a full year should not be excluded. It was frustrating and tore me in two that I had to choose between nurturing my child and paying my bills. I always knew I wanted to return to work but to have to do so too early would have hurt breastfeeding and negatively impacted my child's development. I have a good job and good savings so I was able to make these decisions and do what was best for my family and baby. What though for those who have to choose between paying bills and their baby? What about the fathers who almost all return to work after no more than one or two weeks off? Our babies deserve better. They deserve our love and attention for these first critical months.

Melissa, Placerville, CA

Paid Family Leave was VITAL to my recovery, mentally and physically, from child birth. The adjustment to having a new baby is tough enough. Both my babies were colicky and needed a lot of attention. I was a sleep-deprived mess for at least the first year of their lives. I am so grateful that California has a good Family Leave program. I cannot understand how my friend in other States go back to work after 6 weeks. I just barely started bonding with my baby at 6 weeks. It took me at least 9 months with my babies before I felt like we had a connection. Paid Family Leave is so very IMPORTANT for growing families.

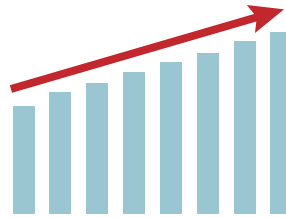
Dennis, Modesto, CA

We didn't have Paid Family Leave with our children, and it was a huge hardship and a definite



IF EVERY NEW MOM HAD PAID LEAVE

ESTIMATES ARE THAT THIS WOULD
**INCREASE EMPLOYMENT BY
APPROXIMATELY 40,000
NEW MOTHERS EACH YEAR**



Boushey, "Family Friendly Policies: Helping Mothers Make Ends Meet."

downturn to our economic status for many years afterward. Wise up. Without Paid Family Leave, economies do not grow. Europe learned this lesson long ago. Why can't we learn from their experience?

Nancy, Santa Barbara, CA

We started our own business so we could have children. Twenty years later, we still work at home. It's been difficult at times, especially 2008 and 2009. We were able to stay home with our children and manage our work and clients with taking care of babies and our family. We've had to reinvent our business and what the product is that we produce and market at least three times in those twenty years. But we're still going strong! And our kids are teenagers now.

Michele, Oakland, CA

When I adopted my daughter at birth, I was not eligible for disability leave (maternity leave) because I had not just given birth. I was only eligible for unpaid leave under FMLA. I used what vacation time I had, but was not allowed to use my huge bank of accrued sick time, even though I was caring for a newborn (being newly born and in need of 24-hour care is not considered being 'sick'). Having poured all our savings into the adoption itself, I could not afford to take unpaid leave.

ONE MONTH after my daughter was born I came back to work part-time, and by two months was back to full-time. I feel fortunate that I had extended family members who could help with my daughter's care, and that I was able to find an affordable and high-quality childcare center that would accept a two-month-old infant.

Not everyone is so lucky. Decisions like these should not be made due to financial pressures, but based on the needs and best interests of the child.

Elizabeth, Carmel, CA

When I adopted my daughter in 1978, I did not have Paid Family Leave and the first few months after her adoption were a real struggle. I do think it is important for companies to offer several weeks of paid family leave to ease the transition into parenting.

Leanne, Chico, CA

My partner and I have been dreaming of the day to be Mommys. We had waited a total of 5 years between trying to get pregnant and then waiting on an adoption list. Our dreams came true and we became Mommys on 12/11/11. I had planned my maternity leave with my job where they said that I had 6 weeks of leave. When I called to let them know that my daughter was born with serious health concerns and was going

to need surgery, they told me we made a mistake.

Adopting a newborn doesn't qualify for maternity leave and there is no bonding time. I have had to exhaust all of my leave and am now paying for a sub which is eating away at my paycheck. My daughter has medical needs on a 24hr basis....and I still don't qualify for leave? Bonding time? Family? What is happening to family values?

Meagan, Alameda, CA

When I found out I was pregnant with twins my husband and I were so excited! After 3 years of trying to get pregnant to no avail, you can imagine how blessed we felt. I was able to get paid leave for a while and my husband was only able to get 3 weeks off. Though I was glad that he was able to get any time off. I suffered from post partum depression (at the time I didn't realize) and I wished he could have been home with us for longer.

I really struggled that first year. I was lucky to have a mom close by to help out when I was feeling overwhelmed. Other folks aren't so lucky. I think its important to spend time with 'your' children in the first year to really bond. My husband and I would have enjoyed going back to work if we both had the time to spend with the kids.

Kimberly, Novato, CA

When I had my first child, I was told I should be prepared to be back in the classroom teaching a week or two after giving birth, or there was no guarantee my teaching contract would be renewed. As a young, untenured professor, working on contract (and thus not subject to FMLA's protections) I was unwilling to take that risk, and I was back working fewer than 10 days after giving birth. I was still

“The most important part for me about having paid family leave is that I didn’t have to choose between work and parenthood. I got to be a parent to my wonderful daughter without giving up the job I care so much about.”

Meg, Oakland, CA

bleeding and blurry-eyed, struggling to master nursing my infant, and away from my newborn for long stretches at a time when we should have been figuring out the ‘family’ thing together.

Laurinda, Goleta, CA

When my baby boy was born, I took 3 weeks off then I had to return to work for financial reasons. As a hospital nurse, I worked 12 hour shifts leaving the house at 6:30 AM and returning at 8 PM. My husband tried to care for our son, but even with the assistance of babysitters for 6 hours a day he was overwhelmed. I would arrive home after 12 hours of work and immediately take my infant into my care and soothe him to sleep.

Knowing that breastfeeding is best for infants, I was dedicated to pumping milk at the workplace. I froze the milk to store it for my son. Unknowingly I froze it in the

door of the refrigerator where it is insufficiently cold, and it soured there. While at work my husband tried fruitlessly to get our son to drink the milk which was sour – and we didn’t know it! My husband resorted to bringing our son to my workplace every 4 hours so he could nurse. Thankfully my co-workers were understanding and gave me breaks to nurse my infant until we figured out the source of the problem.

Meg, Oakland, CA

When my daughter was born, thanks to California’s family leave act, my partner and I were both able to take leave to care for our daughter for the first few months of her life. Before her birth, I had never imagined that it could take two parents to care for one little baby. Afterward, I knew better! I was constantly exhausted, recovering from birth, not getting much sleep, and trying to figure out breastfeeding.

I can’t even imagine what we would have done if I had had to take unpaid leave, or go back to work sooner. I am sure I wouldn’t have been able to keep breastfeeding my daughter, as it took several months for us to get a routine established. I also wouldn’t have been a very useful employee, as I was completely exhausted all the time. I might have had to quit my job, which would have meant my employer would have to put in all the effort to hire and train a new employee, and would have made it harder for me to re-enter the workforce when I was ready.

The most important part for me about having paid family leave is that I didn’t have to choose between work and parenthood. I got to be a parent to my wonderful daughter, without giving up the job I care so much about.

Katie, San Jose, CA

When my husband and I decided to start our family, it was at the peak of my successful career. It was a hard decision, but thanks to FMLA, I was able to balance the important needs of my new family as well as have confidence knowing I could return to work and pick up where I left off rather than having to start over at another company.

In doing this, both of my children are well-rounded and happy kids because of the extended time they had with me at home with them. I’m also a more complete person being given this time with my babies to establish a very loving and nurturing bond. Now, they are 2 and 3 years old and are light years ahead of other children their age emotionally and physically. I know it has a lot to do with me being home with them for as long as I was able to be with FMLA.

Amy, Los Angeles, CA

When my second child was born, I was home, nursing, being sleep deprived, and was told by an administrator where I worked that I could not have paid maternity leave because we had adopted her, not given birth to her, so there was nothing wrong with my body that needed to heal. When I noted that I was still sleep deprived, like every other new mom, that I was still breastfeeding every couple of hours like every other new mom, I was told that was my choice. I had to use all my sick leave, then vacation time, then take leave without pay.

Laura, Oakland, CA

When my son was born, my husband was working for himself and we fully depended on my income. I used my sick days and vacation time plus family leave to get about three months at home with our baby. It



was barely enough time for me to recover from a long, difficult birth, start establishing a breastfeeding and sleeping routine, and get familiar with the breast pump that we would depend on for almost two years. Without that time to bond with my son and prepare the three of us for my return to work, I never could have functioned in my job. Even if I could have afforded to take unpaid leave (which I could not have), my company would not have permitted me any time away from work that they were not legally required to allow. Paid Family leave is critical to American families. Please protect this small amount of help that new mothers and their babies rely on.

Kelly, San Diego, CA,

My son was born six weeks early for no reason the doctors could discern. (I had a healthy, normal pregnancy with no concerns about my weight gain, blood pressure, blood sugar, etc., and no history of premature labor or delivery.) My tiny baby had to stay in the NICU for three weeks, and since I was not working, I was able to be with him every day until he was healthy enough to come home.

My husband, however, was not able to – it was necessary for him to ‘save’ his parental leave for when we brought our son home so he could help me with the grueling early weeks of round-the-clock breastfeeding and infant care. If I had been working, it’s possible that our son would only have been visited, talked to, held, and fed by us for an hour or two in the evenings after work. There were lots of babies in the NICU whose parents I never saw, and if I had to guess, I’d say it was because they were not able to take the time off work for both time in the hospital and time when the baby first comes home. I wish the FMLA addressed those special cases like premature babies, and enabled parents to both spend time with their baby in the hospital, and at home.

“There were lot of babies in the NICU whose parent I never saw. If I had to guess, I’d say it was because they were not able to take time off work for both time in the hospital and time when baby first comes home.”

Kelly, San Diego

Laurie, Walnut Creek, CA

While I did have 12 weeks paid leave, I only had 60% of my salary. I did, in fact, worry about money because my husband had been laid off from his job and was doing contract work. If my parents hadn’t helped us out, we wouldn’t have made it. I think that maternity/paternity leave should be paid at 100%, and also I think it should be significantly longer. At least 6 months.

Terra, Los Angeles, CA

With my first baby (I’m pregnant with #2 right now, due in May) I was working at a small private school, and although I was given job security, I had no paid leave. It was a huge strain on us financially, especially because our insurance at the time was fairly basic, so we owed a LOT for medical bills. We prioritized and had help from family, thank goodness, because breastfeeding was tremendously important for me and he hated bottles from the

get-go. This next time around we are so lucky to have disability insurance through my school’s program, and we are paying extra for AFLAC so my husband can take some paid time off as well.

COLORADO

Phyllis, Wheat Ridge, CO

After having my first child by c-section I was only able to take 4 weeks off of work. I had no choice but to get back to work so that I could provide for my child. The doctor reluctantly released me to go back to work because I told him I would go back part time for 2 weeks and then return to full time. Oh and by the way, I was a brand new mother with a brand new baby. The stress and pressure of being a new parent (especially for the first time) was dwarfed by the stress I felt about getting back to work and getting a paycheck.

Jorddan, Rollinsville, CO

After the birth of my third child, my husband held a job barely over minimum wage and I had a job as a clerk typist My wages were greater than my husbands. I utilized my accumulated vacation to stay at home for ten days. After that time ran out, I had to return to work or we wouldn’t have been able to pay the basic necessities of utilities, water, rent, food, gas, etc. At that time we did not have credit cards and were unable to obtain a loan. I went crazy trying to continue to breast feed my child and finally had to go to bottle feeding. I was exhausted when I came home and often worked until midnight keeping up with the household chores and other children. Ultimately, it took it’s toll on my health—incurring heart palpitations and high blood pressure that doctors had trouble controlling with medication.

After daycare expenses, I netted \$372.00 just enough to pay the electric, gas and phone. Tragic to incur such a cost to myself and family working forty hours just to clear enough to pay the utilities.

Jenny, Nederland, CO,

At least I was able to take an unpaid maternity leave. Fortunately, my husband was able to support our family during both of the maternity leaves I took and my employer was flexible enough to grant me the time off which I asked for (3-4 months each time). It is hard enough – especially as a first time mother – to feel comfortable in that new role of end-all-be-all for a helpless human being, not to mention the physical recovery.

I honestly can't even imagine how hard it would be to return to work only 2 weeks after giving birth. One day during my first maternity leave, I went into a coffee shop with my baby in tow. The young woman behind the counter asked how old she was (probably 7 weeks or so at that time). I was floored when during our small talk, the woman mentioned that she had just returned to work and her daughter was 2 weeks old! How on earth, I wondered, could she even be standing there only two weeks later? Later, as I returned to work, I left my daughter in a day care. Her caregiver had also given birth recently and was really trying to breastfeed.

So while I came in daily to nurse my child at lunch (because of the amazing flexibility and understanding of my boss), she was struggling to even be allowed enough time to pump even twice a day. In a DAY-CARE, she could not get sufficient breaktime. How terrible for her to watch other mothers bring in pumped milk (or to watch me nurse) when she was essentially being deprived of that experience by an inflexible work arrangement. I was scandalized – I still am.

My story was good and ends

well. But these two little anecdotes are shameful examples of how businesses do not respect the societal and even workplace benefits that supporting motherhood through generous leave and workplace nursing support. Unfortunately most businesses in America do not support family and motherhood except through legislation. If that's what it takes to protect families and give them the best possible start, then I'm all for it.

Julia, Boulder, CO

I am a full time working mom. I only received six weeks at 60% and took another 12 weeks unpaid. It was very stressful to take that much time unpaid because my 2 yr old was in daycare. Since I had to go back to work after a 4 month maternity, I could not take my 2 yr out of daycare or I would lose her spot.

Ramona, Longmont, CO

I am now a grandmother, and when I had my children in the late 70s and early 80s, finding good child care and juggling being a working mom was hard. Now that my children are parents, I am sad to see that not much has changed. It is as if we in America do not value family life and children. Our laws and lack of benefits make it hard for those who want to be responsible, good parents.

My daughter had to go back to work after only 6 weeks at home with her child. She and her family simply could not afford for her to be at home any longer. For a long time now, we have talked about things like allowing mothers more flexibility by allowing job sharing. Companies still do not do this, nor do they make it easy for working moms to get away when there is a sick child. We've also been talking about paid leave for parents for a long time now. Can this really be the richest nation in the world? We

should be ashamed of ourselves. How can we be a strong nation when we do so little to support strong and healthy families?

Jessica, Colorado Springs, CO

I am still 'paying back' advanced sick leave I took when my son was born. He is now 10 months old.

Teri, Denver, CO

I did not have paid medical leave for either of my children's births, but I can tell you, it would have relieved a lot of anguish and frustration had I had that.

Vanessa, Englewood, CO

I had no paid leave with either of my kids, but I wasn't too surprised by that, since I worked in a restaurant. We had to scrimp and save to get my standard six weeks at home. The real tragedy was when my husband had to go back to work after only three days off each time (no paternity leave). I needed someone to help take care of me, so I could take care of my babies effectively. We need a policy that puts us on par with the rest of the world!

Tienne, Centennial, CO

I had severe hyperemesis with my pregnancy, so I had used up all my sick and vacation days by the time the baby came. The company granted me six weeks of unpaid leave, which I took. I then decided to go on unpaid FMLA, which I could do because my healthcare was through my husband's company. If I'd relied on my company's healthcare, I would have had to pay COBRA throughout the time I was on FMLA, and couldn't have afforded it. I went back to work when the baby was 3 1/2 months old.



Basically, the company kept my job for me, and that was it. If I'd relied on my job for income, I would have had to go back after 6 weeks. I was committed to breastfeeding, so after I went back, I pumped milk for my baby. However, I could not pump enough during the day to satisfy the baby, and we had to supplement with formula starting at 4 months. Returning to work absolutely required feeding my son formula, although I did continue to breastfeed in the evenings.

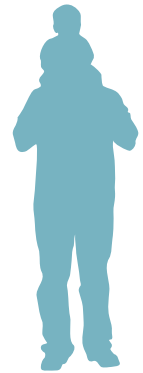
When my daughter was born three years later, I did not return to work, and she breastfed exclusively for 6 months. There was no problem with my milk supply. I have since quit my job and am a full-time stay at home mom. We are expecting again in March, and when my husband looked into taking some time off to help me when the baby comes, he discovered that his company does not allow paternity leave at all. If he wanted to take more than his allotted vacation/sick days, he would need to take unpaid leave and pay for his healthcare out of pocket. Needless to say, he will continue to work and my mother will come to help me with the new baby.

Dolores, Fort Collins, CO

I was a stay-at-home mom with health insurance. Today, however, it is a crime that some mothers have no health insurance and have to worry about money to feed, clothe, and shelter their babies. Paid leave is just the beginning of care needed to give our new citizens a good start in life. Why other developed countries are ahead of us when we are supposed to be the richest is a crime. Education for all should be paid for starting with pre-school as part of our free public education.

My two daughters-in-law had to work. One paid \$1,100/month for childcare! We can afford unending wars and 750-plus bases around the

PAID FAMILY LEAVE BENEFITS DADS



➔ **MORE INVOLVED IN KIDS' LIVES 9 MONTHS AFTER BIRTH**

➔ **LESS LIKELY TO RELY ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE**

Paternity Leave and Fathers' Involvement With Their Young Children. Lenna Nepomnyaschy and Jane Waldfogel. Community, Work, and Family, 2007. & Linda Houser, PhD "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public," A Report for the Center for Women and Work, January 2012

world. Our education system is behind most of the developed countries. Health care is way down the list. I don't know where to start in how backward is our country in caring for its citizens.

Ailla, Louisville, CO

I was lucky to have some paid family leave at my job. Since I had my baby, my company decided that it was too expensive to maintain a family leave policy of any significant time, and has now reduced the paid time off (paid at 55%) to 6 weeks. Have you ever held a 3 month old baby in your arms? A 6 week old?

A baby belongs with his / her mother 24/7 for at least 6 months! I'll take what I can get, but really the people who have it bad, have it really bad. Human Rights Watch report called Failing Our Families changed everything for me. I wish it would change everything in government too!

Tracy, Boulder, CO

I work at a major state university as a non-tenure track faculty member. My university only offers paid maternity leave to tenure-track and tenured professors (the vast minority of female employees). The rest of us have to use our disability leave

if we want to have any paid time off after a baby is born/adopted.

When my daughter was born, I used up all of my disability leave and was simply fortunate not to get sick enough in the ensuing two years to need it. This obviously puts women employees at a disadvantage, since men are able to save their disability leave for surgeries, illnesses, etc. And, after all, childbirth is not a disability! To add insult to injury, the employee handbook actually states that employees should try to plan childbirth for the summer months so as not to interrupt student learning. Someone is clearly out of touch!

Eleanor, Broomfield, CO

I worked remotely for a French company where employees received 16 weeks of paid leave. Since there are only 3 of us working remotely here, the company didn't need to comply with the FMLA so they thought they were being generous by giving me 2 weeks paid and up to 12 unpaid. Also, due to there only be the few of us here, there was no formal maternity leave policy for the US employees.

Despite notifying my company when I was 7 weeks pregnant, they did not come back to me with what I was allowed to take until 3 weeks before my due date – leaving me

little time to prepare/save. Without a decent leave policy for the US, they were not under an legal requirements to give me more leave or to even outline the policy in a timely fashion.

Jody, Golden, CO

My employers standard 'maternity' leave (really short-term disability leave) was 30 calendar days (NOT business days). My son was born a month premature. Needless to say it was unplanned. Consequently, my 30 calendar days of leave was spent in the hospital with my son, and then I had to take a combination of unpaid FMLA leave, sick days and vacation to do the 'maternity' leave time spending time with him doing the normal things a family need to do with a new little being at home, including his special needs due to his prematurity. While the policy of 30 days is terrible, my employer worked with me to accommodate extra leave needed due to my son's premature birth.

Fortunately, I had been around long enough to have vacation to spare. So I feel fortunate that by the time I had to return to work, we had a pretty solid routine. My son finally had the stamina to breastfeed for full meals and he was off supplemental oxygen. But I couldn't help but think about the women and families who were in my same situation who didn't have an employer that helped make it work. The extra stress of a premature baby with special needs, extra medical expenses, would be an incredible burden for any new family on a mere month or even six weeks of maternity leave. It is extremely important for the health of a new baby and his/her parents to have the time to ease into new life and recover from birth. It is ridiculous to assume that it could happen with any quality within six weeks.

I understand that it is hard for

"...When my husband looked into taking some time off to help me when the baby comes, he discovered that his company does not allow paternity leave at all."

Tienne, Centennial, CO

businesses to accommodate an employee on a longer-term leave, but in the end they will benefit in the saved health care costs of a healthier family and baby... and a much happier employee. We need to make a longer parental leave standard for all families.

Margarita, Denver, CO

My partner and I are in the process of adopting a child. As the main bread winner, I fear that I will not have the opportunity to bond with my child because Colorado does not offer paid family leave. My partner has a serious medical condition that doesn't allow her to lift more than 10 lbs. I wish I could stay home to help her out while we get into the routine of having a son/daughter in our house, but unless paid family leave was offered here. I am just going to have to deal with going to work because we cannot afford to not have my paycheck for 12 weeks.

Michael, Boulder, CO

My wife could only take unpaid leave, despite being a schoolteacher, so had to take a month of unpaid

leave just to have a few months with the baby after her paid vacation/sick days ran out and the summer ended. Since she wasn't going to be paid, I couldn't take any days off (also unpaid) to help.

Maureen, Lafayette, CO

Our child was unexpected, but an absolute delight! Unfortunately, we've had to make a lot of sacrifices in order to make ends meet. We couldn't afford daycare, so my husband has chosen to stay home and take care of him, making me the sole income in our home. I had less than a week of sick and vacation time built up, leaving us little income to live on while I was out of work.

Because we were only living on my income, I had to go back to work within a month of him being born, even though I had an emergency c-section and was still recovering from the surgery. We've had to switch to partial formula, because even though I pump at work, I just don't make enough to feed him like I do when he's only breastfeeding. Formula is expensive! I make enough that we can pay our bills, and eat meagerly, but if any emergency would come up, we would be in trouble.

If we would have had paid leave, we could pay our bills, and ensure that if something were to happen, we would still have our savings to cover it. Not only that, but I wouldn't have missed his first smile, first giggle, and other important milestones that I have been waiting my whole life to witness.

Joy, Fort Collins, CO

When I adopted my daughter and brought her home, I was an independent consultant. I had worked hard at my former employer, a university, to provide leave for



adoptive families. Eventually that policy went through, which I feel good about. However, because I did not have paid leave, I incurred more debt and eventually had to declare bankruptcy. It wasn't the only factor but it was a significant one.

I had planned financially for it but the adoption itself took up those savings – my adoption was held up for most of a year once I was in country. Looking at my daughter and how well she adapted, I am glad of the decision I made to work less when we first got home. It was a very tough year last year but things are getting better now. Now I work 4/5 time for a company with a very good sick and personal leave policy.

Holly, Denver, CO

When I had my first child I had to return to work within 3 weeks. I was teaching High School science. I was my families sole income because my husband was in medical school. I only had 2 weeks of paid vacation so I used all of it. I only had a third week off because my daughter's birth came at spring break.

It was so difficult trying to work when I was only getting a few hours of sleep. I wasn't a very good parent, nor was I a good teacher. I was breast pumping in the closet during breaks at school and staying up late at night feeding my daughter. The time was so difficult that I ended up leaving my career in education, which I loved so much. Paid family leave is so important to the stability of our families and our nation. Thank you for your consideration.

Leanne, New Castle, CO

When my son was born, we faced a really hard time. While my husband and I both worked, we are in our mid 20s and still getting a good start in the world. We need

both incomes to survive, especially in early 2009, right after the economy crashed. My son was 3 weeks old, and my husband was laid off, and my mother was battling fatal cancer.

Not having an income during this trifecta of events was so critical to our family, and we are still fighting to recover from the damage that was done. Had we had even 6 weeks of paid leave I could have been less stressed about our family, and able to enjoy the limited time I had left with my mother before she died, and enjoyed the time with my infant son. I would have been able to afford to feed myself and my family, to nurse my son, and to try to get off to a good start like every baby deserves.

CONNECTICUT

Louise, Lyme, CT

I believe there is no greater human right than the right of a newborn baby to be with his/her parents and for new parents to be with their infants. When I had my children 35 years ago, I was able to stay home. I loved them so much, I would have felt devastated if I had had to go to work.

Now I watch my own children having children. They do have to return to work, and I see how devastated they feel to leave their little babies. It is cruel and inhumane to separate parents and infants. We have an economic system that offers no support for parenting, the most important job there is.

Amy, Wolcott, CT

I had to use unused sick time and vacation time when I had my child. What about families that have to care for the elderly that are ailing?

Anne-Marie, New Haven, CT

I'm nanny to a beautiful two-month-old baby girl. People assume she's mine, because she's so tiny. I know that they wonder how her mom could leave her with a relative stranger for ten hours a day, five days a week. The answer? She doesn't have a choice. Unless she sacrifices her prestigious fellowship at Yale New-Haven hospital, she had to accept their offer of TWO WEEKS of paid maternity leave.

She was lucky, though – she timed her pregnancy so well that she was able to give birth right around the holidays, giving her an extra two weeks.

Here's the irony: what she doesn't know yet is that my husband and I are trying to conceive. I don't know what I'll do when I have a baby of my own. I am one of the lucky ones, in my field. I work for a family who gives me paid vacations and pays me my full weekly rate, even when there is a day off for a holiday. They can't do without childcare of their own for months, though. I'll probably be lucky enough to bring my baby to work, but I already feel guilty about that both for my baby's sake and for the sake of the precious girl I care for. I don't want to split my attention, and I don't want the family to worry that I'll give my baby more attention than I give theirs.

My worries are the worries of the privileged – we have health care and jobs and a steady income. We have a financial safety net in grandparents and parents. I don't really worry about us.

I worry about the families with no family leave *and* no child care. I worry about the nannies who lose jobs when they have their own children. I worry about the nannies who are not hired because they ask to bring their children to work, when they have no other viable option.

Lois, Norwich, CT

One of my co-workers had a baby born pr-term Her son only lived a few minuets. She had the baby on Saturday, and was back to work on Monday- because she had no paid sick leave ,no maternity leave, and she had to wait for her day off to scatter her son's ashes because she didn't even get a day of morning. She had no choices because her families had to have her pay check.

Valerie, Stafford Springs, CT

Paid family leave is a must-have for American families; it is unbelievable that our policies have not caught up to our reality. Guaranteed and paid time off is needed when a child enters our lives for the sake of our own health, our child's health, and therefore, the health of our nation and the world. This should not be a priviledge but a right... it is the only common sensical thing to do and the right thing to do.

Betsy, Westport, CT

This is important to me because women are half the population, men can't have these babies, and it is the right thing to do. Why are companies with health insurance paying for Viagra for any man who wants it but not being willing to ensure that our mothers and their babies have the recovery and bonding time they need?

Women welcome their participation in the work force but no man has to make the same type of sacrifice when a baby arrives. Let's join the many enlightened countries around the world and provide paid family leave for healthier and stronger families!

Dawn, Westport, CT

Without paid leave I could not breast feed my child nor bond. Those early weeks are essential to



— FOR THE LAST —
20 YEARS
FMLA HAS BEEN USED
— AN ESTIMATED —
100 MILLION TIMES
**TO PROVIDE JOB-PROTECTED,
UNPAID LEAVE TO WOMEN & MEN**



**TO RECOVER FROM SERIOUS ILLNESS,
TO CARE FOR A NEW CHILD,
OR CARE FOR A SERIOUS ILL
SPOUSE OR FAMILY MEMBER**

National Partnership calculation derived from U.S. Department of Labor estimates of the number of leaves taken annually. See The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993; Proposed Rule, 73 Fed. Reg. 7876, 7944 (Feb. 11, 2008)

the development of a strong attachment. As the great Winncott said there is no baby only the relationship between the mother and the child.

Science has proven that this early relationship is essential to proper development of the child. Without a proper attachment the child's ability to have a strong psyche and good mental health in the future are based on this important first

relationship. Give leave for the health of the nations. Let us feed our babies, nurture their souls, and help build great people for a great future.

DELAWARE

Amy, Clayton, DE

I had my baby girl slightly over two years ago. As a public elementary school teacher, I was not given paid maternity leave. My husband and I began saving for my maternity leave the minute we found out we were expecting a child. We cut back on our spending and worked to condense our bills. Being a teacher, I planned my maternity leave around my due date so my students did not have to experience anxiety wondering when I would be gone. I had to use every one of the personal days that I had intentionally been saving throughout my previous five years of employment. I was able to use three weeks of short term disability, which allowed me to recieve 75% of my pay during this time. After this ran out, I used the rest of my saved sick days. After my sick days ran out, I was able to use FMLA in order to prolong my stay at home with my baby. During these three months, I recieved no pay.

Taking this time to be the best parent I can be cost my family a great deal of sacrifice. Being a brand new parent is challenging enough, but worrying about being able to pay the bills on top of it is even worse. Worst of all though would not having the ability to stay home as long as I did. Some families are not able to sacrifice enough for a parent to stay home and the newborn must be put into the care of a stranger.

As one of the most advanced



countries in the world, it is a disgrace that we do not support new parents. Our country is supposedly concerned with producing highly educated students, but we are not willing to be a society that supports our students and families. In order to experience success, society needs to support families.

It is embarrassing that we have no support system in place for new parents. My whole career is based on taking care of other people's children, however, I was not given any support in taking care of my child. I sacrifice my time on a regular basis for other people's children and to help develop my students into productive members of society, but not being given any financial support during maternity leave makes it very difficult to continue to be motivated.

Mothers need to give 100% of their energy to the proper care and love of their newborn. In order to make society a better place, new parents need to be supported.

Judy, Wilmington, DE

I was fortunate to be able to stay home with my child for three months but it came with the cost of leaving my job as a mental health therapist without any option of paid leave.

What I find absolutely appalling is that the individuals I was working with, recovering drug addicts and depressed and anxious individuals, would continue to receive a monthly check from social security because of their drug addict or mental health status and I was unable to receive any form of compensation for being a hard working woman who wanted to be there to raise her daughter for the first few weeks of her life.

Being a mental health therapist I know the importance of forming that early bond with a child, if all mothers were able to stay home I would have a lot less patients!! It

has been a struggle to afford food, diapers, and our household expenses these past few months but the bonding time I have gotten to spend with my baby girl has been absolutely priceless!

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Alexis, McLean, DC

Due to pregnancy complications, I had to burn all my leave prior to the birth of our son. I almost feel like it would be better to quit my Federal job so we will be able to take care of our infant during this time that is so critical, particularly since we are breastfeeding. Going into the office, pumping breast milk and sorting about refrigeration is taxing and stressful.

Cristina, Washington, DC

I am one of the fortunate ones to have worked for an employer that provided me with a little more than 3 months fully paid maternity leave, of which I was so grateful for. This was a combination of short-term disability, bonding leave (from the company), and my own vacation time which I took after a difficult cesarean.

Being able to take maternity leave knowing that I was still getting paid and protecting my job at such a crucial moment in my life was a godsend. I wasn't as stressed and was able to nurse my baby and be with her. However, three months is not enough. I needed more time, but could not take it due to financial constraints.

It's time we moved on from being the only industrialized nation in the world that doesn't recognize how crucial it is to have PAID maternity leave for everyone, AND for MORE than just three months.

Vanessa, Washington, DC

I am self employed, so when I had my first, I had no other choice. I am lucky, my partner earns enough income to cover our bills. My friends who have salaried work usually get a few weeks of paid leave but then they have to take several weeks of unpaid leave in order to be able to stay at home 12 weeks total. They stress a great deal over these hard decisions.

I now live in the Netherlands and the laws here do so much more to support families. My friends in the Netherlands experience a lot less stress compared to my friends in the U.S.

Heather, Washington, DC

I felt relatively privileged to have 6 weeks of paid leave and I coupled that with all my vacation and a few more days of unpaid leave to take 11 weeks for my second child. I was still devastated when I had to go back to work – crying in the conference room because I wasn't emotionally ready to return to a job that I loved.

All of that was on top of the fact that 11 weeks and up front planning still wasn't enough time to find affordable, quality day-care (for a middle-income family) in a major city like Washington DC. The waitlists are sooooo long. Luckily, my mother was laid off and could cover for the additional 6 weeks it took to get a spot for my infant daughter in a childcare center.

Children and parents need time for nurturing, bonding, and adjustment to the new arrival. It's criminal the way we can't find a way to do this as a society. More flexible arrangements at work help but ultimately every new mom is due unpaid leave to get their affairs in order and to adequately care for their newborn child.

Julia , Washington, DC

I had 3 weeks off after the birth of my daughter and still telecommuted. I think my daughter thought she and the laptop were twins! So many other countries have a balance between work and family and it is time the US caught up!

Ralph, Washington, DC

It was wonderful to have paid family leave. It gave our new family structured time to connect and support my wife with our lives changing to having our first child. If we want to build stronger families in the United States we need to have this benefit for us all.

Bela, Washington, DC

My company does not offer any paid leave besides 4 weeks of short term disability leave that allows me to earn 60% of my pay. I am pregnant with my first child and I am looking forward to bonding with him and breastfeeding to ensure he has a good, healthy and strong start to life. I know that breastfeeding and pumping take a huge toll on a woman and that if I wasn't able to take off at least 3 months from work, it would be a nightmare. Fortunately I have worked at my job for 7 years and accrued a lot of sick and vacation time so I will have to use it all to give myself three months to be with my baby during his first few month in this world. I have been saving it for a long time knowing that I would need it when the time came. In fact, one of the main reasons I have so much time built up is that I lost a baby last year and had been saving up my time for him. Since losing the baby, I continued to save time to ensure that this time, I'd be ready.

The trouble with having to use all my time up front is that I'll have no time left over when I return to work. What will I do when my baby

gets sick, the nanny can't work, or I don't feel well? I'll have no sick or vacation time left. It's so important that our country supports women and allows us time to bring new children into this world properly so that they get a good start to life.

Jennifer, Washington, DC

Neither my husband nor I had paid family leave. We had to save for a year before having our babies so that we could take some time off. I had a post partum hemorrhage after the first birth, which made time off imperative for both of us. I also needed time to get a good start breastfeeding and to pump and save a stash of milk to use when I returned to work. As it was, I spent most of my time trying to find good and affordable child care. I was anemic, exhausted, and worried about money. I felt like the victim of a cruel joke--really, does it have to be this hard?

Mark & Djinni, Washington, DC

We recently adopted newborn twins domestically. Having leave to bond with adopted children is especially critical, but for every new parent there should be assured leave. DC has a relatively generous 4-month leave policy which allowed us to provide our babies the love and stability they needed and us to adjust to being parents.

FLORIDA

Annette, Miami, FL

Back in the days when I had children I worked for a wonderful company (IBM) that paid you after you had a baby. I benefited from it twice and wish we had days like that again. I feel so sorry for my children who are now at an age to get marry and have children and

start their families. Today is so different and things have changed so much. I will do everthing possible to help my children and other's get Paid Family Leave.

Sadiqa, Tallahassee, FL

Because the baby needs mommy and mommy needs money to feed mommy and baby. It also gives a great foundation to bonding, love, and home values.

Crystal, Brandon, FL

Being a parent is already hard enough without worrying about basic necessities. While some babies are 'easy,' all babies require a LOT of care. I know I couldn't have made it through my kids' infancy if I'd had to worry about where the food was coming or if we would have electricity.

Elizabeth, Largo, FL

I am a teacher. I have taught 9th and 10th grade English since 2000. I am used to taking care of other people's kids. It's a shame my job won't allow me to take care of my own. I gave birth to twins 10 days before Christmas. Because I had a high-risk pregnancy and ended up on bed-rest for the last week before my induction, I went on FMLA 12-week leave immediately after Thanksgiving break.

Unfortunately, my husband was also fired from his job 2 days before I went on my unpaid leave! Now, we are living off of our savings account with NO income except the miniscule amount that unemployment offers him, which is barely enough to cover what the school district is CHARGING me to maintain my insurance benefits. (Yes, you read that right...not only is my leave UNPAID, but they CHARGE ME \$450+ per month on top of



bringing in NO money!). I would LOVE to take the remainder of the year off to spend with my two newborn babies, because my husband has a hernia (which we can't afford to have fixed because we can't afford the \$700 copay right now) and has a hard time handling both babies by himself. But I can't. As soon as my 12 week FMLA leave is up, I HAVE to return to work, even though I am not emotionally ready to leave my twins alone all day.

After all these years of working with other people's children and being the best teacher I could be, I wish I felt appreciated enough to spend a measly half of a school year with my own kids!! I don't think that is too much to ask.

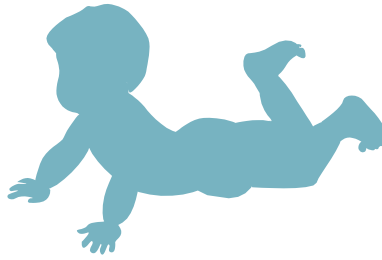
Julie, Tampa, FL

I had paid family leave, and my husband was the breadwinner for the family when my son was born. These factors allowed me to stay home long enough to bond with my baby and breast feed.

A friend of mine just had a baby. She is the breadwinner of her family. She was denied paid leave due to a minor glitch. The company where she worked for 4 years showed no loyalty to her. Financially, this was devastating to her family. The laws must change. American families and family values are the core of our country. Lawmakers must protect American families.

Jennifer, St Petersburg, FL

I had PTO/STD enough for 7 weeks. My daughter was in day-care from 7 weeks old. I work 50+ hours a week; my husband has a full time job also. In the past 18 months of my daughters life, we have 'called out sick' more than if they would have just given me the full 12 weeks of time paid off. Getting a healthy start on life goes a long way. All employers should be



IN THE UNITED STATES
51 PERCENT
OF MOTHERS HAVE
NO PAID LEAVE

SOME TAKE UNPAID LEAVE,
SOME QUIT THEIR JOBS
& SOME LOSE THEIR JOBS

Bureau of Labor Statistics Press Release: Employment Characteristics of Families 2009, May 2010

made aware of this. In the end they will get a happy employee back, ready to work and concentrate on doing a good job...knowing their baby is happy, healthy and ready to be taken care of by someone else.

Valeria, Miami, FL

I had the fortune to have been able to set aside some savings, with great help from my husband so that I could stay home during my unpaid leave. However, being a first time mom, I could just plan for the expenses that had been familiar to me and just a few that I imagined would come with a new baby. I had no idea that a newborn would be so expensive, starting with the health costs not covered by insurance, private health insurance on its own, baby furniture and gear needed for the first few months, etc.

My savings (supposedly for 6 months) lasted about two months. I considered myself lucky that my

boss needed some help from me, and allowed me to work from home, so that I could work part-time, 9pm-1am, when my little angel was sleeping, reducing the time I could rest, time with my husband (incredibly minimal those days) just to help a little with daily leaving expenses. In addition we had to live off the credit card...my husbands salary couldn't cover for all. Six months over, then back to work, with huge daycare expenses, and considerable credit card debt! We spent about six more months just paying off our credit cards.

My son is almost four, I would so much like to give him a sibling, but it is just stressful thinking about going through the unpaid maternity experience again. Moms, parents, need to stay with their babies, and not just a few weeks but a few months, until at least moms can figure out the babies language so that caregivers can provide for the little one's needs.

Lynn, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL

I had to return to work about a week and a half after the birth of my son, even though I was technically on maternity leave. There were important meetings going on which, if I missed, I would be in jeopardy of losing my job. I was unable to attend all of the meetings, however, as I was still recovering from complications suffered during pregnancy. It was obvious that my management was not happy about me 'not being a team player'.

Two weeks after returning to work at the end of my maternity leave, I was laid off. The entire experience made me feel trapped, and because of it, I have vowed never to return to corporate America. I know many women in my position, and truly believe that much talent is on the sidelines because of these types of inhumane policies.

Barbara, Hollywood, FL

I thank God for my insurance, It is a must, I, adopted three of my grandchildren 10-years ago. I had to take a short leave of absence to get them into Florida system. They were born in California, they had to get immunized, get physicals and so forth, enroll them in school etc.

Ken, Jupiter, FL

I was a single FATHER with a newborn and a 1.5 year-old. Family leave should be for the PRIME CARETAKER, not just the mother. It was 7 years of hell & my darling kids absolutely suffered from this 'great Nation's' shameful apathy.

Wanda, Palm Coast, FL

I was a state employee and had worked long enough to have a few weeks paid leave when my baby came. Being the practical person I am, I went back to work with one week leave left since I knew I would have doctors appointments. This meant that I had to return to work well before any twelve weeks. I HAD to work. I cried all the way to work the first couple weeks I left my baby with someone else to watch her take her first step. I cried when I was told that I had missed that. PLEASE provide paid leave!

Julie, Sunrise, FL

I was back at work within 3 weeks of having my first baby. I was supposed to have 4 weeks paid off time. I had worked at that company (small commercial print shop) for almost 8 years and they claimed that they did not have the money to pay me for any more than 2 weeks paid. My husband's job wasn't any better to help out with finances.

I had to go to work to be able to help pay our bills, and the first few months was the hardest for me to do that... being up most of the

“Quote goes here.
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A quote will go
right here.”

Name, City, ZZ

night for the baby, having to run around finding someone to watch her while I worked, and sometimes I had to bring her to work with me but that was not easy for me to focus on my work.) It was very hard on my family, having to struggle with getting some sleep and focusing on baby, work & household. I think all mothers should have at least 6 weeks paid time, and be able to be there for their baby at all times and not to have to worry about bills and their jobs.

Anna, New Port Richey, FL

I was lucky enough to be home with my babies during the first few weeks, however, I think sending our children to daycare at 6 weeks old is absurd. I was forced to put my first born in daycare at 6 weeks old and I feel that is too young to be separated from a mother. The bond is barely there but yet we have to rush back to work. And the father never really gets to bond with the child until they are older because they don't get the time off. I think there are a lot of issues like this happening in this country while other many other countries follow other ways. Our priorities have gotten twisted over the years

and it should not be work before family. It should always be family then work.

Alison, Boynton Beach, FL

I was lucky when my daughter was born because it was a planned pregnancy and I'd been working at my job long enough that I'd saved up quite a bit of leave time. I was able to take off about 3 1/2 months and have it all paid for. I couldn't afford to take off any unpaid leave, but if I'd wanted to I could have qualified for up to 6 months (unpaid) with FMLA.

When I came back to work I wanted to continue breastfeeding but found it difficult to pump at work so ended up giving up after a few weeks. Also around the time that I came back to work my daughter had to start going to physical therapy for an issue she had when she was born. My mom was taking care of her during the day and was able to take her to the PT sessions (about 2-3 times/week), but I also would have liked to go and since I didn't have any leave left I usually wasn't able to.

I ended up having some depression/anxiety issues that I believe were related to the fact that I had to go back to work so soon. I think it would be great if we could be like many other countries and have paid family leave.

Jamie, Clearwater, FL

It is extremely important for new mothers to have paid FMLA. I recently was pregnant with my second child and I unfortunately was put on Bed rest at 7 1/2 months, so I had to start taking my FMLA before I even had the baby. I didn't get paid FMLA, but I did have short term and long term disability which was paid for by employer. If it wasn't for that I would have had



to work on bed rest or lose my job.

After I had the baby, I was so less stressed that I didn't have to worry about the bills and my job. My main focus was my new baby and trying to get a little sleep when possible. The first couple of months after a baby are extremely important for the baby and mommy bonding time and not to mention letting your body heal. The emotional stress and imbalance from having a baby is enough let alone having to add the stress of financial problems on top of that. This country is supposed to be the greatest country in the world, but yet we lack many of the great policies that are practiced in other parts of the World.

Deborah, Hollywood, FL

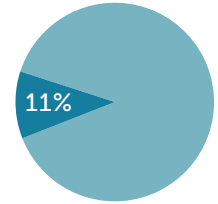
Maternity leave was a blur, and since I had to spend all my accumulated vacation and sick time, it was also a time when my family was struggling to pay our bills. Families should not be penalized financially for taking a few months off of work to do the real work of humanity—having, feeding, and loving babies. I took 4 months, and I couldn't imagine taking a day less.

Pamela, St Petersburg, FL

My company did not have paid maternity leave... they had short term disability. Pregnancy and being a new Mother is NOT a disability. I wasn't there long enough to have gotten benefits (they require 6 months) – so between losing hours at work (and money) for my prenatal visits, I also had to lose 6 weeks of pay, because I had a cesarean with complications and my Dr would not approve me to work sooner.

At 6 weeks old, I had to leave my precious breastfeeding newborn with strangers since no family was around that could watch her and I was a single Mother. It was heart wrenching every single day to have

IN 2011 ONLY 11 PERCENT OF ALL U.S. WORKERS HAD ACCESS TO PAID LEAVE SPECIFICALLY FOR FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE



Bureau of Labor Statistics, Leave benefits: Access, private industry workers, National Compensation Survey, March 2011 (Department of Labor, 2011), Table 33

to leave her. My mothering instincts knew we were supposed to stay together – but it was either that or I'd be homeless, without a job and an infant. It is disgusting that out of all Developed Nations, only America does not have national mandatory paid maternity leave... most even offer paid paternity leave too! This needs to change!

Jean, Orlando, FL

Over twenty years ago, my sister who is a doctor and my sister who is a geophysicist both had the experience of going back to work when their first babies were two weeks old. That had been a condition of getting employment. Anyone who thinks that is good for the family, the mother, or the baby is insane and a sadist to boot. We do need laws to state and provide for the obvious. Both tried to breast feed but had little success. Gee I wonder why?

More recently my grandchild was born by C-section. Her mother took two months of paid maternity leave and continued to breast feed after returning to work until she and her doctor felt it was time for weaning months later. Her first week back she only had to come in twenty hours while she and the baby were adjusting.

Jessica, Jacksonville, FL

Personally I did not have enough paid family leave. I had to have a C-Section, which became infected.

After a week of being home in extreme pain with my newborn, I had to return to the hospital for an additional week stay.

I was still not completely healed when I had to return to work. I also lost most of my milk. I pumped three times while at work during the 8 hrs but could not keep in enough milk to satisfy my child. My child and I both suffered because of the minimum amount of time I received (or did not receive) to stay home before having to return to work.

Jeannette, Niceville, FL

Twenty seven years ago, when my daughter was born, I was fortunate that I had worked long enough at my job and for an organization that allowed me to accumulate sick leave. Consequently, I had sufficient sick leave to take off two months full time. In addition, the bookkeeper pointed out that if I spread my sick days out taking a day per pay period, I would not lose my health insurance.

Fortunately, I had saved enough money to take another four months part time, so I was able to continue breast feeding which we now know is extremely important for organ and brain development. Our nation's future requires that we join the rest of world by ensuring healthy children by guarantying maternity leave for parents.

Theresa, Cape Coral, FL

Twice I have used the Family Leave. Once when my son was very ill, I used this to take care of him in the hospital. Now I have been diagnosed with an autoimmune disease and Paid Family Leave allows my husband to take time off work to transport me to my doctor's office out of town. Without the Family Leave Act I don't what I would do. I don't drive due to my illness and my doctor is a three hour drive away from us. Please, don't ever change this law.

Michele, Orlando, FL

Unfortunetly during times to care for child birth I had no choice but to not work and lived off of public assistance for that time. Which is public assistance that is from tax payers money. I now am a full time worker, single mother and student. Survivor skills had to kick in for the birth of my children but it is very unfortunatate that one may have no choice but to apply for foodstamps and public assistance and WIC to care for their children.

Ron, St. Augustine, FL

We both worked for the county and my precious lady was paid for what seemed like a long time after the second onset of non-hodgkins lymphoma. Due to FMLA she was able to stay on her (our) insurance for an extended period. I was allowed to take time off from work intermitently to care for her.

Jamee, Sarasota, FL

When I was on maternity leave with my first child, despite my husband and I saving money throughout my pregnancy, I had to return to work after 8 weeks as we had only \$25 remaining in our bank accounts – total. We had planned as much as we could but my husband's work was unexpected shut down for

“...I have been diagnosed with an autoimmune disease and Paid Family Leave allows my husband to take time off work to transport me to my doctor's office out of town.”

Theresa, Cape Coral, FL

3 months for construction issues a month and a half before my daughter was born. He managed to find some part time temporary work to help with expenses, but we still went through our entire savings before I was forced to return earlier than we would have liked.

I was a nervous wreck trying to budget childcare in with the added expenses of having a newborn AND struggling to pay for bills. I also feel that returning to work after such a short time disrupted our breastfeeding relationship as I began to have supply issues almost immediately after returning to work.

I ended up giving up on breastfeeding after less than 4 months due to the demands of working full-time and not being able to pump at work. After learning that America was one of the few countries that doesn't offer any form of paid maternity leave I was disgusted. We can do better! We have to do better for our children!

Nicola, St. Petersburg, FL

When our second child was born I didn't have paid leave available to me. As my family's primary source

of income we could not go 8-12 weeks without my pay, so in order to continue to pay our bills and absorb the additional expense of a second child, I had to take a 401K loan which I will continue to pay back over the next 5 years.

In addition, after returning from my leave I subsequently owed my company the health insurance benefit that was paid on my behalf while I was on leave, unpaid. So, in addition to a pay reduction due to the 401K loan pay back expense, I had additional expenses deducted from my pay over a 2 month period for the health insurance that I owed to my company. Financially the impact was very difficult for us to absorb so I had to shorten my leave to only 8 weeks before returning to work full time making it not only difficult financially but emotionally.

Kerry, Clermont, FL

When we were expecting our first child, my husband and I were joyful, but also anxious about the strain the new arrival would put on our household budget. This was compounded by the fact that I had only partial short-term disability coverage through my job, so we had to save up to replace 40% of my income for a twelve-week period. Of course, at the same time, we had to purchase baby gear, a crib, and all sorts of things necessary to properly care for a newborn.

We have friends in other countries, including Canada, the U.K., Portugal and the Netherlands, and all – without exception – receive lengthy paid maternity leave as a matter of law. I'm disappointed that my own country has not followed suit. Please remember that children benefit our society as a whole. Yes, they're my children, but they're also U.S. citizens and future community leaders (not to mention voters).



GEORGIA

Grace, Roswell, GA

Caring for my 90 yr old mother-in-law was a labor of love but also great sacrifice. For the 10 years she lived with us, I couldn't really work and local help was either non-existent or way too expensive for my husband and I. So now I'm 77 and my husband is 84 and we're trying to figure out how to supplement our fixed income. This would not have happened had I not lost 10 years of earning power.

Princess, Atlanta, GA

During my pregnancies, I was trying to learn how to take care of each baby (because each child's personality is different), trying to heal from a CEsarean and trying to fight fatigue and lack of sleep. Had I not been able to have paid family leave, I would have lost my job from fatigue and I would not have had the opportunity to heal properly but the bonding and caring process that builds and grows between a mother and child would have been even harder to develop.

Maybe someone out there has had that perfect baby that sleeps when they are supposed to and only cries when hungry, sleepy or needing a diaper change but I did not. Therefore, the bond that was established so that I would know if my child was being well taken care of or not, may not have developed at all and since each caregiver is different, it would have prolonged the frustration that the baby had in establishing a routine.

Georganne, Athens, GA

I experienced a hard time when I had a baby in 2007. I was a part-time worker at the University of Georgia and unfortunately I had to go without pay for 6 weeks during my maternity leave. My husband

and I had to defer car payments and rearrange several bills to make sure I could eat properly and pay bills because I chose to breastfeed.

Also, it took months after my leave once I returned to work to catch up bills, not including the medical bill of having my daughter. It was a stressful time when it should be more enjoyable. Of course with my faith in God, I chose to not worry badly and trust all things will work out. However, I will say even with the faith it doesn't take away the fact the leave without pay with having a new child is hard. I couldn't imagine what it will be like in the future when I have another one now that I have one child.

Catherine, Marietta, GA

I am a single parent and have 5 children. I have been working since the age of 15 and I'm now 34. It was always a comfort when I was pregnant to know that my job supports families like mine. My last pregnancy was the hardest so I needed extra time off in order to heal from the delivery.

My job supported me fully while I was out. Unfortunately I have many friends who did not have the benefits I had and had to get loans or family help while they were out on maternity leave. God forbid if they were doing it all alone. Having a baby is supposed to be a joyous occasion not a worrisome one. It seems unhumane to not support women and families during this process so please make it possible for all women and not some.

Nakeshia, Lilburn, GA

I am currently 2 1/2 months pregnant and have already started fretting about what I am going to do when it is time for me to take maternity leave. Not only will I not be paid for the time off, but due to my loss of income I will have to un-

enroll my 4 year old from child care because we won't have the money to cover the expense.

This all ties into the Paid Family Leave as well as better funding for Child care. It's a little alarming that due to my husband and I not being married when our first 3 children were born I was able to receive assistance that allowed them to remain in daycare and additional help through WIC. But now we will have to pay for everything out of pocket. Our income will shrink drastically and the amount of bills will just increase. There is a grave possibility that I may have to take a shortened leave, 6 weeks rather than 12 due to the need for the extra income. Losing more time with my new child and rushing myself back to work is something I am certainly not looking forward to.

Angelina, Atlanta, GA

I am lucky. I work for a company with paid maternity leave. Well, it's not quite paid leave. I can cash in my accrued vacation and sick leave while I take my FMLA. I am so lucky. Most of my friends don't have that cash-in option.

Most of my friends, all working professionals, have had to choose between staying at home with a new baby or working to keep the lights on, pay the bills, and keep the house. None of us should have to make that choice. It's not fair. It's unrealistic. And it's brutal. I work for a union. I am a member of a union. And thank goodness, too. I can't imagine what my life would have been like if I had worked for a company that cared more about the bottom line than about a hard-working, committed employee's needs.

Amy, Augusta, GA

I consider myself very fortunate to have been able to take 12 weeks of paid leave for the birth of each

of my two children. I was able to do so only because certain conditions were in place: the chair of my department (at an academic medical center) was very open and willing to accommodate my request, and I had accumulated enough paid sick and vacation days that I was able to cobble together leave time. Those 12 weeks didn't seem like nearly long enough, but I cherished them and was able to establish breastfeeding that persisted for more than a year. Other women at my institution have not been so lucky: either their department chairs are not willing to allow that much leave, or they have not accumulated that much leave.

In addition, my husband had to argue for his time off at the birth of our child, since the policy to allow the use of sick leave for the birth of a child does not specify whether it applies to men. We will soon be having my third child, and this time, I have not been able to accumulate enough leave to have 12 paid weeks. My husband and I will be dipping into our savings account so that I can have 12 weeks off, since a substantial portion of it will be unpaid leave and I can't imagine having to return to work sooner than that.

Having a paid parental leave policy would allow both men and women to spend time with their newborns or newly adopted children, to participate in that crucial bonding time, without the worries of financial burdens or job loss. It's time for the U.S. to join the rest of the developed world in recognizing the benefits of this to all of society.

Joanne, Atlanta, GA

I was lucky to be living in Colombia when my baby was born. Colombia's law allows 12 weeks of paid maternity leave as well as 2 hours of break time for as long as you are breast-feeding. Incredible that a developing country



HALF OF THE U.S. WORKFORCE IS INELIGIBLE FOR FMLA DUE TO THEIR CURRENT JOB TENURE OR SIZE OF THEIR COMPANY

The Effects of Paid Family and Medical Leave on Employment Stability and Economic Security. Heather Boushey and Sarah Jane Glynn, April 2012

would have more supports for families than the U.S.!

Paid maternity leave allowed me to bond with my baby and provide him with the sensitive, responsive, and nurturing care all babies need for healthy emotional and cognitive development. And because he wasn't exposed to other children, he escaped the colds and ear infections that so many children get in day care. Don't all babies deserve the best we can afford?

Kristen, Marietta, GA

I work as faculty at a state university, where a new mom gets six weeks of unpaid leave after having

a baby. Many people, including myself, cannot afford to go unpaid for six weeks. I am lucky enough to have accrued enough sick and vacation leave to continue to get paid during my brief time home with my new baby. But many of my colleagues are not so lucky.

A woman should not be penalized for having a baby. It is ridiculous that the only benefit a woman gets when she has a baby is the promise that she won't lose her job as long as she comes back in six weeks. A six week old baby does not belong in daycare, she belongs with her mom. Being a new parent is hard enough without the added burden of lost wages. A woman should not be penalized for having a baby!

Ryann, Woodstock, GA

Since I had no paid maternity leave, and my husband at the time could not get paternity leave, I chose to quit my job in order to stay home with my new-born for the first few weeks before returning to school part-time and slowly building up to full time.

The cut in our budget, however, required that we move in with my parents, who, fortunately, were supportive of this decision. They both work in field of mental health and often with children and keep up with the research and literature in their field. They are therefore highly aware of how important it is for young infants to form bonds of trust with their environment – particularly the primary care giver(s). Everyone had to tuck in their elbows, but we did it.

I sometimes wonder how paternity leave might have affected my ex-husband's relationship to our daughter. If he had seen more of her initially, bonded with her, learned to care for her more com-



petently, would he have felt like a better dad, a more important figure in her life, and therefore that he mattered in her life? Would it have changed his decision to drop out of her life completely when our marriage ended?

He felt at the time that he was a failure as a father (she was only about two) and she would be better off without him and nothing I could say could change his mind. Would his attachment to her have been stronger, giving him the motivation he needed to overcome or at least begin to work on the personal issues in his life that led to our divorce? I'll never know now.

HAWAII

Carmen, Honolulu, HI

For over a year I saved all my vacation time and sick time so that when my planned pregnancy happened, I worked all the way up until one week before my due date. When my son was born, I used up all those days I had saved, which only totaled 3 weeks. Then I was on 'unpaid' leave and the 'lucky' part for me was that my job let me take 3 months off and return to the same position. This wasn't the law, this was just the ethical thing to do.

But health insurance was a major problem, since after the birth, I had coverage for only another 3 weeks – the time I was getting 'paid.' So the standard 6 week check up, plus check ups for my son were not covered. We paid out of pocket for those, depleting our savings entirely.

When I did return to work, I returned with no savings cushion, no time to take off for sickness or doctor appointments but at least with comfort that my office supported my breastfeeding and pumping schedule – though I had no place to

"I sometimes wonder how paternity leave might have affected my ex-husband's relationship to our daughter... Would it have changed his decision to drop out of her life...?"

Ryann, Woodstock, GA

do it so I had to purchase my own cubicle structure to set up around my desk for privacy. Another expense. And this, my friends tell me, makes me lucky. At least I had a job and was able to spend those precious first 12 weeks with my son.

Tia, Wahiawa, HI

I, too, was lucky to have paid leave since my first child required constant holding. He had colic and, after a round of MMR, he not only got a high fever but he also started a downward spiral into mental illness that now, he is out of.

One thing I want to point out to Congress is that if abortions become almost impossible to get, there are going to be many mothers who will need financial support since the 'father' of the baby usually doesn't stick around when the pregnancy has been caused by rape.

Since Congress wants to focus on the rights of the unborn children – what about the rights of the born children to be able to have parents to take care of them?

ILLINOIS

Hope, Chicago, IL

I am a 21-year-old woman without children, but I have lived briefly abroad in Denmark, where paid family leave is not only guaranteed to the mother, but to the father as well. Family units are altogether stronger and more valued there, and paid leave – along with their highly sophisticated socialized healthcare system – extends Danish lives and makes the Danes the overall happiest people on the planet. They are healthy and industrious, creative and open-minded people, and their systems of care facilitate those qualities. I cannot fathom birthing children in a country that doesn't mandate paid family leave.

Nora, Chicago, IL

I am a new mother of an eleven week old baby boy. My employer has NO maternity policy or paid leave. It is barbaric. I am using up every minute of vacation and luckily got 4 weeks of short term disability at 60% of my salary (which is not much but better than nothing!). I am then taking unpaid leave to get to about 13 weeks. The sad thing is, everyone considers my situation 'lucky'.

Kate, Chicago, IL

I did not have paid leave when my daughter was born, but I was committed to staying home with her for her first year of life. To do so, we had to move into an old apartment building, where it turned out we had roaches and no guarantee of getting hot water when we wanted – I often had to boil water to give my baby a bath! I shopped at thrift stores and entertained myself borrowing videos from the library.

I wish I had had paid leave so I could have given my family a more

comfortable life. Despite warm and fuzzy media images of mothers with their new babies, the reality is that new motherhood is an exhausting, physically painful, emotionally challenging and often isolating time. Having enough money to live comfortably can help mothers take better care of themselves and their children, in turn dedicating more energy to the healthy development of their young and the future of America.

Shelly, Woodstock, IL

I had access to FMLA for both my pregnancies and cannot imagine what it would have been like if I did not have that benefit. But in reality so many women do not have the ability to save and be supported while on unpaid leave.

It is long overdue for the USA to join the modern era and recognize that allowing families to settle in and get a healthy start is more important than anything else. Another benefit is the ability to establish breastfeeding practices and begin pumping if desired to get ready to re-enter workforce. This is nearly impossible to do in just 6 weeks so flex time is key and breastfeeding friendly workplaces are paramount to healthy families.

M, Chicago, IL

I had to go back to work and drop my son at day care when he was 10 weeks old. I couldn't concentrate fully at work because as a new mom. Both my mind and my body were focused on my baby. I would like to have another child, but I can't afford to take the necessary time off of work and I can't afford day care.

Katrina, Champaign, IL

I had to quit my job when my son was born because the amount of money I was earning was not

enough to cover childcare costs. This plunged us further into poverty and prevented us from having medical insurance as our insurance was through my place of work. My son had trouble nursing and gaining weight and I suffered from postpartum depression. Paid family leave would have helped us immensely. We would have still had my income and health insurance.

Jill, Chicago, IL

I used to work on staff in the restaurant industry, and I was amazed to see our kitchen workers on their feet every day for 8 hours late in their 8th month of pregnancy (something that exhausted me – and I wasn't pregnant!), and they'd come back to work 3 weeks after giving birth. It was hard on their bodies, but it has to have been even harder on them being separated most of the day from their newborns. But they had no choice.

Morgen, Chicago, IL

I used up all of my vacation days, sick days, and went on short term disability in order to ultimately earn half my salary during the 12 weeks I took for maternity leave. I then returned to work half time and our new family struggled financially during the first year of my child's life. I had used up my sick days and could not take any more once I went back to work, and became I very ill to the point of being hospitalized for pneumonia. I am now back full time but the big financial and health setbacks we had with our first child means that we probably can't afford to have another.

Kathy, Oak Lawn, IL

I was fortunate enough to have paid time off. This consisted of STD, company paid time and vacation days. I came back to work about 14 weeks after the births of both of

my sons. It was hard coming back to work and difficult trying to get daycare in place. I saved some of my vacation days in case my kids were sick (which they were). Breastfeeding did not go so well either.

I think I would have had an easier time knowing I had time at home to work through it. You are going on no sleep, taking care of existing kids, taking care of the house, etc. It's all a crazy blur. I also had post-partum depression with the birth of my second son. No one realizes how quick the time goes and the first 6-8 weeks you are just trying to survive. If paid time was offered and you knew you could work in PTO along with it, the whole experience would be better. I think I would be more prepared to go back to work. I think I would be more productive. I am also very loyal. If my company was good to me in this way, I would never forget it.

Andrea, Berwyn, IL

I was laid off in 2003 when I was pregnant with my son. I ended up being out of work for nearly 2 years. I have been working full time for the last 5 years, and am still trying to pay down all the debt incurred in just 2 years off work. I have been fearful of having a second child because of what it might do to us financially. New moms need to have financial guarantees.

Stephanie, Bolingbrook, IL

I went back to work full time when my daughter was 6 weeks old. I only had paid leave at 65% of my salary. I am in a sales job, so I lost commission not working also. My company also did not adjust my sales quota for the short amount of time off because they said my quota was based on 12 months of work and just because I wasn't there the



full 12 months wasn't their fault. So I didn't hit my quota and lost additional bonuses because of that. In addition to lost sales and a reduced salary when gone. My boss also gave away many of my large accounts 3 days before I went on maternity – and not just temporary coverage – permanent. Discrimination is in full force. I told him maternity leave is also a sort of medical leave. He didn't seem to care.

I was diagnosed with post-partum depression and was on meds and seeing a therapist. Stressing to get my newborn to daycare every day and then having to drive home with her for the hour drive home screaming and crying because she is hungry (and I am stressed and driving) didn't help my depression. It has been 2 years and I am still not in a healthy mental state and I feel like I missed out on a big part of my babies life. Because I was on antidepressants, I didn't want to breast feed. Had I been able to get help and relax more, I could have tried to get by without meds and would have been able to breast feed. Something I will remember the rest of my life.

I know there are many women in much worse positions – especially single moms. I wish I had time to help them myself. I am lucky to have a supportive husband who helps.

Emily, Evanston, IL

I work for a university and was lucky to have some paid maternity leave. Exempt staff members at my university can use accumulated sick and vacation days. But paid maternity leave as such does not exist. This is difficult because having a baby is very expensive, and to have your income cut at the same time you're accumulating medical bills is hard. Some might say that families should save adequately to afford this time, but the truth is that life doesn't always happen so neatly.

Children are our future, and I



IN 2011 ONLY 37 PERCENT OF PRIVATE-SECTOR WORKERS HAD SHORT-TERM DISABILITY INSURANCE

WITH LOWER RATES FOR PART-TIME & LOWER WAGE WORKERS

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Insurance benefits: Access, participation, and take-up rates, private industry workers, National Compensation Survey, March 2011 (Department of Labor, 2011)

think our society should support bringing them into the world. The cost of hiring and training a new employee if a mother quits working has got to be significant, possibly coming close to what her paid maternity leave would cost. I hope the United States will support women in their childbearing—not to do so is pretty barbaric.

Elise, Elmhurst, IL

I work part-time as an adjunct college instructor at a community college, and thus am not entitled to any benefits – leave, health-care, etc... How did I manage? I cut wayyy back on the classes I taught the semester I gave birth, and called in 'sick' for as much as I was permitted—3 credit hours/term.

The day my son was born I was responding to emails from students on my laptop computer in the hospital while breastfeeding him (good thing this was my second child and I had already learned how!). For the first few months 'back to work' my mother came to the school with me and watched the baby for me while I was in class or holding office hours.

So... while I'd love to continue helping members of my community attain higher education, I won't be able to afford it any longer (I'm no longer out-earning the cost of childcare) and have made the decision to leave my position.

Judi, Elk Grove Village, IL

It is so important to take care of your new baby yet so many people must return to work for financial reasons. Paid Family Leave would so help families. I am a firm believer of breast feeding which should be done at least 4 to 6 months. It is essential for healthy babies and maternal bonding. Fathers need to be involved with their children and should be given the option of paid leave. I had to lose money because I was not paid for a leave after I had both of my children. Please help to put our children and families first, not business as usual.

FMD, Skokie, IL

My oldest son was born 6 weeks premature. At the time, my husband and I barely made over minimum wage, though we tried to save a little money as well as accumulate vacation time. My employer did not, and still does not (after 18 years, I still work for the same company) offer paid maternity time off to hourly employees. The end of the story is that for financial reasons, I had to get back to work after four weeks – my son wasn't even supposed to be born yet! He was small and scrawny and it was so hard to pump enough breast milk for such a small newborn.

Babies need their mother. Babies need breast milk. Workers that are sleep deprived cannot be very productive. And if I was planning on having more babies, I would

consider moving to another more civilized country that supports parents through paid maternity leave.

Andrea, Wauconda, IL

We feel extremely blessed and lucky to have a healthy 1 year old girl in our family. But it was a difficult start for us. Our little girl was born 9 weeks early – very unexpected. I did not have any difficulty during my pregnancy and nothing leading up to the delivery date would have lead us to believe she would have come early.

I am very fortunate to work for a company that offers paid time off and allowed me to take the full 12 weeks allowed under FMLA but I was completely robbed of my FULL 12 weeks as 6 weeks of the 12 were spent by her in the hospital and we had limited time with her. 6 weeks at home with any baby, especially a premature baby, is not enough and something needs to be done to help families spend the quality time that is needed and deserved by all families.

Lynn, Chicago, IL

When I had my kids I was able to take off work. It helped a lot, especially since I cleaned people's houses. I didn't get paid leave but my then husband at the time was working so it was ok to do. What about women who don't have husband's or he might be out of work. Or they can't afford to lose part of their income. we were luck since we had some savings to help us out and family to borrow from too.

Dierdre, Winthrop Harbor, IL

When I unexpectedly got pregnant last year, I was grateful that my third trimester would be during my summer break because with my history I would be on bed rest. As it was I had barely enough sick and personal days to cover the 6 weeks

of maternity leave. I was lucky that all my stays in the hospital were during my break and that there was a holiday during my maternity leave.

Once I came back in October at exactly 6 weeks, I had only 2 sick days left until the next school year started, the following September. Normally I would not worry about sick days, but with 3 children under the age of 5, illnesses are expected. If I must take any more than 2 sick days, I will be unpaid for those days which is something that my family living check to check cannot afford. More than once have I given one of my children Tylenol before daycare in the hopes that whatever is causing them to feel ill will go away. I have also brought a sick child with me to work until other family members are able to come to my work and pick that child up and care for them during the day.

I am not complaining. I have cherished every moment of those 6 weeks I had home and am extremely grateful that this time I have a schedule that allows me to pump twice a day and someplace other than a 4 by 6 foot closet. However, I would have truly loved to have not used all my sick days for maternity leave and spend the rest of the school year hoping and praying that my children do not get any illnesses throughout the long flu and cold seasons.

Britt, Lake In The Hills, IL

When we had our son, my husband and I both worked for a company with a pretty good parental leave program. Primary care givers got 3 months paid at 100% and the other parent got 1-2 weeks paid at 100%. Unfortunately, our son didn't sleep through the night until about 5-6 months old.

After I returned to work from my 3 month leave, I was working towards a promotion. So, my poor husband suffered the brunt of the

sleepless nights to allow me to focus on work. As a result, his work suffered, and he was let go. I left the company a few months later, with my new title in hand.

Five years later, we find ourselves without the second child we always thought we would have. Since my husband was out of work for nearly year, our finances suffered tremendously. To add to that, his new company doesn't offer any paid leave. And, my new company only offers 2 weeks of paid parental leave. Yes, I have the option of taking 12 weeks unpaid. But, we are still trying to dig ourselves out from the previous job loss. Put simply, as much as we want another child, I'm petrified that we would find ourselves declaring bankruptcy if we followed our hearts. Oh how this brings tears to my eyes, while I watch many of our friends continue to grow their families.

INDIANA

Katie, Chesterton, IN

As a full time working mother of two children I know how difficult it can be to juggle work and child care. I had children in my thirties and fortunately had savings enough to afford three months of unpaid maternity leave. However, I know of women who had to put their 6 week old babies in child care so they could return to work, both to avoid losing their jobs (they didn't qualify for FMLA) and for financial reasons.

I think our country has not put families first, and it is taking a toll on our children. Education continues to fall behind other countries and I have to believe that the lack of work and family balance afforded in our country is partly to blame. The less time parents can spend with children undoubtedly will affect the



development (social, educational, etc.) of those children. It's time that our country put our families first and this type of legislation would be a great first step in that process.

Aleksandra, Fishers, IN

Coming from the third world country where maternity leave is up to a year, 80% of it is paid throughout the whole year, and the government pays the mother certain amount per month per kid, I was very surprised to find out that America is nothing like that. My employer had 4 weeks maternity leave for natural birth, and 6 for C-section. I was required to work all through the pregnancy, and on one occasion when I had morning sickness, I was scolded for calling it in. I knew I could not leave my baby in the daycare at few weeks, so I decided it was not worth dealing with a pressure and stress of such an employer throughout my pregnancy just to leave once I give birth.

I had to quit my job. If I didn't do it then, I would have done it after delivery. Now, we are down to one income. I would love to have a job, but I can not get out there to try to build my career when I know that I will have to quit next time I am pregnant. It is sad that we have to chose between our financial stability and our reproduction.

Manetric, Indianapolis, IN

I am a married, 27 year old woman with two children. I work and attend school full time. I am what you would consider the working poor. If my husband or I were to lose our jobs or our vehicles we would be in a bad situation. In January of 2010 we would have been between a rock and a hard place if I didn't have a job that offered FMLA. Six weeks worth of paid leave still wasn't enough to help and so I had to go back to work before my child was 3 months.

But I am thankful because there are many people who do not even have 6 paid weeks off with a job that will still be waiting for them. We need Congress to do the job they were sent to do and help American families and those looking to start families succeed and be apart of the American Dream.

“ It is sad that we have to chose between our financial stability and our reproduction.”

Aleksandra, Fishers, IN

Amanda, Bloomington, IN

I am thankful for my paid leave when I had both of my kids. Without it, I would have lost my job. The job that allows me to work flexible hours and also covers my health insurance for the family. And it is my career; one that I value and am thankful to have. All women deserve this and our society needs to do more to support new mothers.

Linda, Bloomington, IN

I had a very short paid leave. Certainly not enough. It was embarrassing to share why I was going back to work 3 weeks after having my son to extended family living in Germany. They have laws there that actually support families and the development of children. Let's get with the times and truly be 'leaders of the free world' shall we? Family leave is critical to our public health.

Nicole, Bloomington, IN

I was a newspaper reporter. I didn't get ANY paid time off – had to use all my sick days, vacation days, etc. I knew that as soon as I told my employers I was pregnant, I could not take any of those days – I was told I'd have to use them all for maternity leave – meaning, even if I had horrendous morning sickness, which I did, I couldn't take a sick day because I'd need it when the baby arrived. So, I waited until the last possible time to tell the employers I was pregnant (so I could go see my family while I could, during early pregnancy).

I ultimately quit because I figured why work for such little pay/benefits when childcare costs so much? They cancel each other out.

Phaedra, Bloomington, IN

I was lucky to have Family Medical Leave and if I did not, I never would have been able to breast-feed my child. The American Pediatric Association recommends breastfeeding for the entire first year of a child's life – at minimum. The health benefits to our children in the short and long term are not disputed. Yet, breastfeeding is very hard and time consuming. In our case, it involved feedings every two hours (pretty common) and pumping. Yes, in the second six months of my child's life, I pumped at work, but babies eat less after the first six months. Pumping is expensive and exhausting. It makes sense for a country that is reflecting on health-care to invest in our children, which means investing in paid parental leaves. How can we be so behind Europe on this one?

Jessica, Greenwood, IN

I was not lucky enough to have a paid maternity leave. I was one of those that had to save as many vacation days as possible before the birth of my baby. Luckily I am able to roll-

over PTO days from prior years. As my husband and I planned to start our family, I also had to start stockpiling my vacation days before I even got pregnant. With this being our first child, we had no idea as to as much extra expenses came with a child. I intended on taking a full 12 weeks off of work even though I was only going to get 7 weeks paid from my vacation time.

On top of all the other stresses of having a new baby, I was scared we wouldn't be able to pay our bills but I wanted to stay at home with my son as long as possible. I did breastfeed my son until he was 5 months old. I did pump once I went back to work. Luckily my employer was very considerate of me pumping and I was able to do it for so long.

Angela, Fort Wayne, IN

Mine is a situation where I had no leave. Even taking leave with no pay was not an option. In April of 2004 I gave birth to my third daughter. The day I had her, I went into labor at 6am but went to work anyway. Around noon I announced that I was leaving to go have a baby. At exactly 5pm my daughter was born. Already being a single mother with two other children at home, I was not one to lounge around in the hospital for a few days if it was not absolutely necessary.

The day after I had my daughter, we were both released at 11am. Upon getting home and settling us all in for our new life with a new addition, I sat down to send an email to my co-workers and bosses who wanted to see photos of the new baby. Immediately after, the COO sends me an email wanting to know when I was coming back to work. I was miffed to say the least. After some going back and forth it was decided that I would work from home (I was a web developer, the only one actually). He conceded to this after I explained that I couldn't even get a daycare to take her prior to her being six weeks old.

“Mine is a situation where I had no leave... The day I had her, I went into labor at 6 am but went to work anyway. Around noon I announced that I was leaving to go have a baby.”

Angela, Fort Wayne, IN

Working from home and taking care of a newborn was no small feat. I was breastfeeding, up every two hours, and I was exhausted but lived on caffeine to make deadlines, sometimes not sleeping at all. This lasted about a week before the COO again emails me and says that he needs me there in the office so I was just going to have to bring my baby to work. Being a single mom with my only income as our support, I had no choice. This greatly impacted my family and especially my daughter.

I stopped breastfeeding as there was only one communal restroom at the office and I couldn't be in there for a half an hour every two hours. I didn't even get that six weeks to focus on her, bonding with her, and the bonding between the siblings. I always felt that she got mom's 'second best' because the first had to go to my job. Without the job we would have been homeless.

Jessica, Bloomington, IN

I'm on paid maternity leave now with my first child. I'm so grateful that I can spend these first couple of months sleeping and breastfeed-

ing on my daughter's erratic schedule. If I had to be somewhere first thing in the morning right now, I know that neither my daughter nor my employer would be getting me at my best.

Mary, Spencer, IN

When I returned to my teaching job after the birth of my first son, the principal would call unscheduled teachers meetings after school on sporadic Fridays. Unfortunately, my desire to continue to breast feed my son left me leaking breast milk while a hungry baby waited at the sitter.

Even though I tried my best to adjust to the workplace as a new mother, the workplace makes no allowances and takes no consideration of family priorities. As a nation, we bemoan poor parenting, but in our behavior, we value employee productivity over parent time. Our broken schools and overburdened mental health problems are symptomatic of our misplaced values. Those who tout family values should support family leave.

IOWA

Timothy, Fairfield, IA

A mother's presence with her new born is by far the most important investment in the future that a community can make, whether that community is defined by immediate family, a village, a country, or our entire planet. The emotional and physical health of the individual is the basis of our survival, let alone quality of life.

As a self employed musician, prioritizing my wife's presence with our daughter was a challenge, and the consequences of that decision are with us to this day, both in



our daughter's sense of self, and in terms of our financial situation. We need to support this fundamental level of life in every way possible. Thank you for listening.

Barbara, Decorah, IA

By the time the FMLA passed, my children were out of the home, but my mother moved to the town where my husband and I live. She was already 89, but in quite good health for her age. Nonetheless, as she began to decline, I was able to be available in an emergency as well as to attend doctor's appointment with her. I was extremely grateful for that experience.

Angie, Webster City, IA

I had a combination of paid and unpaid leave after my daughter was born since I hadn't had a chance to build up too much sick leave and vacation time before her birth. It was important to me to take the full 12 weeks I was allowed (thank you FMLA!!!), so my husband and I budgeted for the weeks of unpaid leave. I am so grateful for the time I had to recover from a difficult labor, learn how to parent my infant, establish breastfeeding, and be sure that my little girl would be properly taken care of when I returned to work.

Those first few months were a fog and a blur, but I was able to concentrate on my family with the security of knowing I had a job to return to. I firmly believe that all families need paid family leave. I think this would be a humane policy that would go far towards reducing poverty and child abuse in our country.

LeAnna, Cedar Rapids, IA

I was domestically serving my country in AmeriCorps when I found out I was pregnant. They had no leave policy in place for ma-

ternity, let alone paternity, and so if I didn't want to lose my Education Award (not to mention health coverage), I had to work 50+-hour weeks during my entire pregnancy to 'earn' four weeks off, after which point I had to be back at work. Luckily, I was able to bring my daughter to work in a sling for the last month of service, but my experience of becoming a mother was pretty hellish.

I was a single mother with no family support for many hundreds of miles. I had to go on antidepressants for the first time in my life within days of my daughter's birth, and I've been on them ever since. I look forward to a day when I can become a mother again under more favorable circumstances. I think it would give me more emotional and mental resources to raise a healthy child.

Lauren, Solon, IA

I'm a graduate student and an employee of my university. While I have a right to 4 paid weeks of vacation, both times I had children while in school, I had to scramble to make arrangements with my department to find a substitute teacher, ensure that my pay would continue, and ensure that my sub would be compensated. I would have preferred to stay home with my daughters for 6-12 weeks without the worry of returning to work, but instead I went back to teaching part-time when they were one month old. I had to pay babysitters because we have no local family to help out. I was exhausted, anxious, and depressed both times.

My husband had a full-time job at the time of our daughters' births, but they pressured him not to take the FMLA leave guaranteed to him by law. It was implied that he would be replaced if he took this leave. Both times, he went back to full time work after only three days at home with us. This placed

an unfair burden of childcare, nurturing, cleaning, etc on a recovering mother, and undue stress on an exhausted father.

KANSAS

Shawna, Lawrence, KS

I did not have paid leave when I had my baby. I was lucky that we were able to temporarily go without my paycheck, using my husband's pay and money from savings. We also had several generous gift cards from friends and family members. It was very hard. Our daughter had jaundice for the first week and wouldn't eat. Every time we tried to feed her, she would take a couple of drinks and fall asleep. We worried constantly. Because I didn't have paid leave, I started to try and work from home after 4 weeks. It was crazy.

They say sleep when the baby sleeps, but you can't do that when you have to turn in a quarterly report or check someone's work for errors. I could barely focus. I felt like I was being split in two. With the hormones, I cried all the time. I went back to work at 6 weeks and had to leave my baby at a daycare. That was the hardest thing I've ever done. The first day she was only there for about 2 hours. I cried so much. I missed her. She missed me. It was terrible. She still wasn't sleeping through the night (obviously), so neither was I. My work was substandard and I'm sure I could have been a better mother if I could have focused on being a mother.

I still consider myself lucky because I have such an understanding boss who let me be a little crazy and even let me bring her to work sometimes (or work from home since it was the coldest winter on record and there were days when it was minus 20 and I didn't want

THOSE WHO TAKE PAID LEAVE ARE 40% LESS LIKELY TO RECEIVE FOOD STAMPS



IN THE YEAR FOLLOWING THEIR CHILD'S BIRTH COMPARED THAN THOSE WHO TOOK NO PAID LEAVE

Linda Houser, PhD "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public," A Report for the Center for Women and Work, January 2012

to take a baby under three months old outside). Our country's parental leave policy is barbaric. Good parents are present parents. Good parents are not stressed out about how they will pay the bills. Good parents can devote themselves to their children and not have to worry about their jobs.

Jennifer, Lawrence, KS

I got laid off permanently due to the job contract ending just before I found out I was pregnant. I collected unemployment benefits and tried to look for work, but just as jobs were becoming a little less scarce and more available I was starting to show. In this economy no one was going to hire a pregnant woman.

Now that my benefits have run out, there are no provisions for pregnancy or leave for a newborn that I could find. It is also nearly impossible to talk to a live person on the phone to ask questions. The automated options are sparse. It seems fruitless to even bother. I have just spent all of my savings and am now facing foreclosure. It is a worrisome start to my baby's life, not to mention the blow to our family's mental and emotional well-being.

Shari, Newton, KS

I had to go back to work one month after my first child was born because I had no paid leave. I was

barely even able to get around much as I had to have a c-section. I was fortunate to not have to go back that soon after my second child but again, no paid leave at all so things were really tight.

Same with my 3rd child. I've never had any paid leave and always had to worry about when I'd need to go back to work and how we could tighten our belts just a little bit more (even though we weren't living on much to begin with) because of my not working.

Susan, Overland Park, KS

I work from home doing medical transcription for a company based out of state. I am considered a self-employed contract worker. They send me work as it's available, and sometimes don't honor my requests for time off. I worked right up until just before my daughter's due date, at which point I told them it might be better if I started my leave then, rather than going into labor when I had a big batch of unfinished work due. It was another week before my daughter came, so I was able to spend a week nesting.

My husband took two weeks' time off at her birth. He is union, also contracted to another company, and as such does not get paid time off. The two weeks that he stayed home with me and our newborn, we had absolutely no income. Then, just a few days after he returned to work, when I was not quite 3 weeks post-partum, my

'bosses' (self-employed, after all) started asking if I was ready to start working again. I all but had a nervous breakdown, ball of hormones that I was. I managed to hold work off another week, and then started in with a light workload.

Part of this is simply the nature of being self-employed. I do not get sick pay, vacation pay, or holiday pay. I do not get insurance benefits. They don't automatically deduct taxes or offer any type of retirement plan. But if I could have gotten six weeks of pay from the government, even if it were less than I was used to making, it would have been something, and I would not have felt as pressured to return when they asked me. I'm not looking for a handout, but even \$200 a week would have helped us out and given me more time to recover from what was a very traumatic birth and continue bonding with my daughter in her earliest days.

Jeanette, Wichita, KS

My son had a difficult time breast-feeding and I was lucky enough to get paid short-term disability for 6 weeks after delivery and my company set up a home work station for me to telecommute for half of the day after that. My son never liked bottles and would wait until I was home to nurse. I was so lucky to have an employer that would work with me to ensure my son was happy and received only breast milk for the first six months of life. All moms should have the ability to ensure their babies get the best start in life.

Laila, Sublette, KS

We have yet to have a baby but are looking forward to the time when we can, and yet, looking forward with dread, as well, because my employment doesn't provide



sick, professional, or vacation leave, let alone, maternity leave, nor can we afford to make ends meet if I don't work for any length of time. It ought to be a standard provision for women to be able to nurture the future generation of laborers and achievers during a most critical time, and would benefit us all if legislation were passed to make it so. Without that support net, getting pregnant is essentially a leap of faith, expecting that somehow things will work out once the baby is born.

KENTUCKY

Lisa, Lawrenceburg, KY

After our 2nd child was born, it cost more to go to work than to stay home. I stayed home because my spouse's job paid the health insurance. He didn't get to take much time off after each birth, either. I had an emergency C-section during the 2nd birth and needed more at-home care. If he could have taken family leave, that would have helped tremendously.

Rebecca, Louisville, KY

I have been very fortunate to have been able to take three months fully-paid maternity leave with both of my children. During that time, I was able to establish a close bond with each child through breastfeeding in addition to constant and consistent interactions. Throughout those three months I was home, neither child had any health issues, both ate and slept regularly and well, and both developed exceptionally well.

My husband has not been so fortunate. He did not have any leave when our first child was born and had to return to work three days later, having only had a few vacation days (he was not allowed to

take sick days). I believe this to have been a large part of the reason why he and our daughter did not bond as well as he has been able to bond with our second child. With our second child, my husband has been home since birth (due, unfortunately, to being unemployed, but the resulting relationship with our son has been amazing) and the difference in his relationship with our son is obvious.

Luckily, he has now been able to

“Leaving him at daycare after only 6 weeks was the hardest thing I've ever done.”

Carrie, Lebanon, KY

establish a close rapport with our daughter and they have a loving relationship. However, I am confident it would not have taken them nearly two years to do so had he been able to spend time at home during those first few formative months, as is evidenced by his interactions with our son. I believe strongly that the United States should enact legislation that would make both maternity and paternity leave mandatory such that parents and children can establish an early bond that psychological research proves is so crucial throughout the lifespan.

Robin, Newport, KY

My son was born in 2009. The 12 weeks paid leave I had was joyful and stressful. I had all the normal assignments: my own recovery, getting to know my baby and learning the

mysteries of how to be a parent. If I had not had paid leave, the time I would have had to spend at home would have been much more stressful. I would have been very distracted from the most important and essential learning that takes place.

Without the paid time off, which I had to accumulate by working, I would have had to return to work almost immediately post c-section. Dr. Harvey Karp calls the first three months of an infant's life the 'fourth trimester' due to its importance in the baby's transition to life outside the mother and importance in infant development. In my work as a post-partum RN and Lactation Consultant at a hospital, I have spoken to several women who had to return to work in 2 weeks or less, and others who didn't know what they were going to do. This is a huge consideration for women when deciding about whether or not to breastfeed. This must be a very difficult choice to have to make, it is a choice between your child and survival.

James, Crittenden, KY

The story will probably sound familiar: After the birth of our last child (#4 and a beautiful little girl), neither my wife nor I received any sleep for the first three months. She was on an unpaid leave and I continued working for income to be coming in. I have never been any more fatigued in my life. The net result was that I had become dangerous. I also was lucky. I work in an occupation which has a high rate of persons injured on the job. I was a recipe for disaster and I had a little angel that looked out for me.

Carrie, Lebanon, KY

When my first son was born, I had only 2 weeks of paid time off saved which meant that I would go unpaid for 4 weeks. Anyone who has had children knows that 6 weeks of leave is not anywhere near enough, but

that was all that my husband and I could afford.

Leaving him at daycare after only 6 weeks was the hardest thing I've ever done. I am now 7 months pregnant with my second son. I will be taking 8 weeks of leave this time, but only because my current employer offers short term leave hours which pay at 60% of salary after full paid time off expires. You earn these hours as well and I do not have enough to cover the entire 8 weeks. So once again I will go unpaid during maternity leave, but I cannot imagine only taking 6 weeks again.

For a country that claims to care about the family and family values, our leave policy and compensation for those growing their families is laughable. I urge our lawmakers to put their money where their mouths are, and truly support the American family.

LOUISIANA

Misty, Ponchatoula, LA

I was very lucky to have 12 weeks of paid leave to use after my youngest son was born. My husband lost his federal contract position during my maternity leave. If I hadn't had paid leave, this would have left us in a very tight spot with three young children.

As it was, we are able to scrape by on one income until he is able to get work again. Because I had paid leave, I was able to still stay home with my baby and breastfeed on demand as planned. I was able to give him the very best start possible and am so thankful for that.

Anne, Abbeville, LA

When my 2nd infant daughter was adopted, I was concerned because I was her 4th 'mother' in 4 weeks. She had been in two foster homes between her birth and her

adoption. Luckily I worked for a Catholic college which valued family bonding, so I was able to take a reasonable paid leave in order to bond with her.

On the other hand, when my out-of-state parents needed care, I spent six weeks and 4 months at different times away from work in the piecemeal fashion mentioned – some sick leave, some limited family leave. Each time I had to go to unpaid leave, but at least my job was held for me.

Stacy, Metairie, LA

When my first of three children was born, I was working as a teacher in California at a private school. There was no family leave in place; I was forced to apply for disability, as my husband and I were barely making ends meet even before our daughter was born.

You can't apply for disability until AFTER your child is born, as you have to have a date of birth on the application, and it takes six weeks for the application to be processed and the first check to arrive. Luckily my husband and I are frugal and were able to save enough to make it through those first six weeks, but it certainly didn't help to have that financial strain over our already sleep-deprived heads.

Childbirth is an emotional, exhausting, exhilarating time and it is not a time that parents should have to be worried about whether or not they will be able to pay their bills or not. I never have gone back to teaching, as I found a job that requires less of my time and has a bigger salary (teachers don't get paid enough, but that is a different blog altogether!), but I do believe that if I felt that the company I worked for was supporting me after the loyalty I had shown them, I would have returned to work for them. I hope that we can make families a priority in this way in our country, as other countries have.

MAINE

Sonia, Brooklin, ME

Basically I had no paid leave, spent two months falling into debt because my baby was sick and then I was told that my job was gone. I could have a cashier job back with less flexible hours and less pay. So I fell into more debt because my salary would even pay for the child care, let alone any thing else.

I almost lost my home and I did end up moving... and haven't had another child. The child I have now has a few disabilities and I can barely hold my head above water now- and only do so because my son has state insurance because no other insurance company will cover his preexisting conditions. I would love to have another child, but it is simply not financial feasible.

Kristine, Portland, ME

I had no time off because I was in Law School when my daughter was born. I ended up going crazy, literally and having to withdraw from school. It was horrible and I would not wish it on anyone. Women deserve better treatment than this.

Annette, Lincoln, ME

I was fortunate to have 8 weeks paid medical leave after both my c-sections. It allowed me to establish breastfeeding while I was recovering from surgery. I was able to continue (pumping while at work) to nurse until the babies were 10 months old. I wish I could have been home even longer but I am grateful that my employer was as supportive as they were because I know so many others aren't even that lucky.



Mianda, Saco, ME

Paid family leave is so important during this transition period in a family's life. Not having to worry about finances and being able to focus on your new little bundle is a huge stress relief. Parents barely have the energy to get through the daily necessities (eating, sleeping and nursing) those first 12 weeks, let alone having to worry about paying bills.

I worked for my employer for eight years and had built up all my sick, personal and vacation time in order to have 12 weeks paid maternity leave. Unfortunately I was so severely sick during my pregnancy I had to use six weeks of sick time, which cut into my maternity leave. On top of that, my daughter arrived five weeks early. I couldn't imagine going back to work after six weeks, especially since my daughter's adjusted age would have only been one week! Thankfully we have a savings cushion because I ended up quitting my job.

A friend of mine recently had a baby and has to go back to work after four to five weeks! She's a hair stylist and has no paid time off. She's worried about how this is going to affect the breastfeeding relationship between her and her son, but doesn't have much of a choice.

Heidi, Monmouth, ME

With the births of each of my children came the extreme financial stress of being out of work (and not getting paid) for more than half of my twelve week maternity leave. Having a child is an amazing thing, but it is also a very difficult adjustment for many, especially first-time, moms.

I think everyone would agree that it can be very stressful learning the ropes and trying to figure everything out, along with taking care of yourself. The added burden



MORE THAN
HALF
OF THE WORKING POOR,
WORKING WELFARE RECIPIENTS,
AND WORKERS WHO JUST LEFT WELFARE
HAVE NO PAID LEAVE

Katherin Ross Phillips, "Getting Time Off: Access to Leave among Working Parents" (Washington: The Urban Institute, 2004)

of financial setbacks, for our family, anyway, probably doubled this stress. Paid maternity leave would be LIFE CHANGING for millions of family in this country, leaving more energy to focus on the new, amazing miracle they just brought into this world.

MARYLAND

Jacqueline, North East, MD

After delivering my son last April, to stay home I had to use all my limited sick and personal days to cover the first few weeks of maternity leave. Then I took several more weeks unpaid (even though it was financially stressful for my husband and I) to establish an attachment bond that allowed for a strong breastfeeding and nurturing relationship between my son and I.

I feel grateful that I was able to stay home for 4 months when my

son was first born. My husband could only take one week because he had to use his paid time off to stay home. I believe that maternity *and* paternity time should be paid so that parents are encouraged to stay home in those first critical months with a newborn in order to create a nurturing bond. This nurturing bond is critical and fundamental in fostering a healthy and appropriate emotional, psychological, environmental, and biological relationship between baby and family.

Julie, Bethesda, MD

Always remember that not having maternity leave makes everyone sick. As a federal employee, I have no paid maternity leave, though I do have paid sick days. In the 4.5 years I've been a parent, I've had approximately 37 bad colds, but I have never once taken a sick day for them. I come to work. Why? Because I can use sick leave as maternity leave, I have been hoarding it for my next child.

So in essence, I have no paid sick leave, even though we're all supposed to get it as federal employees. Every day of sick 'leave' I take costs me a whole day's pay – sometime in the future.

Katrina, Reisterstown, MD

As a physician, when our son was born, I had no option other than to call on the Family Medical Leave Act to create the time to care for him. This gave me three months of unpaid time to breastfeed on demand, and bond. It was a decision that was a financial disaster, since I still needed to pay my medical school loans. We reeled from that decision for a long time. However, it was the best decision we ever made. It guaranteed that my son had the absolute best start in life – one on one care, unlimited on-demand breastfeeding, and a

strong attachment. These are all priceless. I am convinced that if we put our money where our mouth is in terms of things like 'family values' that we would be a far healthier and more sane nation. Adults who create the opportunity to care for an infant 24/7 are transformed by the experience. It is incredibly challenging, yet deeply nurturing for everyone.

The documented health benefits for the infant carry well into adulthood. Even more profound are the myriad of emotional consequences of having your needs met by a loving, devoted parent. I strongly support paid parental leave. I feel that both mothers and fathers deserve this – and it should be a right for infants to be with a parent in their early months. Also, by allowing mothers and fathers paid leave, it will hopefully not cause employers to gender discriminate when hiring.

Erin, Silver Spring, MD

At the time we had our child, I was in a very lucky position. I had worked at my job for 5 years and had accumulated sick leave, had great disability insurance coverage and had paid leave too. I took 4 full months of leave that was paid. My husband was on leave from his job when the baby was born and was working on the presidential campaign from our home, so he got to be 'onsite' for the first month as well and after my leave was up 4 months later, he was able to take 2 months of paid leave from his congressional job to stay home with our child too. He says it was the best experience he's ever had caring for a young baby on his own.

Juliet, Baltimore, MD

By not having paid maternity leave, my ability to breastfeed my little one was hampered. I simply could not pump efficiently at work. This affected my performance at

work and ultimately led to PPD. As a public health issue, breastfeeding is important as many childhood illnesses are averted by breastfeeding. If the mother-baby dyad is broken because of an early re-entry into the workforce, it is likely that exclusive breastfeeding will be hindered.

Yvonne, Capitol Heights, MD

During my last pregnancy which was ten years after my second daughter was born, I had to leave work early due to a few complications. I didn't have any savings so I had to get help from social services until I was able to return to my job when my daughter was just 3 months old.

I was blessed to have a good, supportive man who was the father of my daughter to help me financially and I did have three baby showers that provided me with the material things my baby needed but I was breast feeding and it is very important to be at home with your baby and you need the bonding as well as the rest because babies do not sleep all night and we as mothers are so tired and need to sleep during the day or when the baby sleeps in order to be able to get on a schedule to make things

"I'm convinced that if we put our money where our mouth is in terms of things like 'family values' that we would be a far healthier and more sane nation."

Katrina, Reisterstown, MD

work for both mom and baby. Therefore, we do need the ample time off from work to be able to heal properly, be a good mother and be able to function and return to work as a healthy and productive employee when the time is right for us individually.

Bayla, Baltimore, MD

I am a midwife, supporting other women through their pregnancy and birth. Yet when I gave birth, the hospital I work for doesn't offer paid maternity leave for providers. We get our contracted annual 4 weeks of vacation/sick time, and that's it! Luckily I had a simple birth and postpartum period, but I care for many women who don't. I also have an understanding boss who doesn't mind me bringing my 4 week old to work. It is very difficult to pump breastmilk at 2-3 weeks postpartum and then send a 4 week old to daycare, considering what an upheaval your life is currently in, not to mention the children and their germs a newborn is exposed to in daycare.

We worry about how American children are turning out. Latchkey children with both parents (or just one) working long hours to make ends meet. This is something we can fix! Almost every country in the developed world provides for paid maternity leave. Let's take care of our children at this most vital developmental stage and let their mothers stay home to raise them!

Chelsea, Baltimore, MD

I am a professor at a local university. I love my career. I love inspiring students and opening minds. I have exceptional teaching evaluations and students who crowd into my office to talk about their lives, grades, and ideas. I have made many sacrifices to my family



planning in order to get through graduate school. I would have liked to have kids earlier, but I was trying to be responsible about when I could have a kid. I thought that it was my responsibility to plan my entire life around having a child at the right time in order not to inconvenience anyone. However, once I got pregnant with my first child, something was wrong. I was horrible sick. I vomited 6-8 times a day and had to go to the hospital because I was losing weight and throwing up everything from water to ice cubes! This lasted the entire pregnancy. I had hyperemesis gravidarum and now have a 50% chance of having it with each of my subsequent pregnancies. Forcing me to take off 10 months of work or under perform.

I have no idea how I can have a family under the current maternal rights and still have a great job. I refuse to make my family decisions around other people's convenience anymore. I'm a great mother, we have a great family, and I'm realizing that I have the next 40-50 years to be a great professor, but only the next 7-10 to be the mother to young children. Right now is the time for me to invest in my family, but unlike my male colleagues I am physically limited by how pregnancy affects my body.

It is ridiculous that I live in a country that has one of the worst family paid leave of any country in the world. It is ridiculous that we are forcing half our population of successful workers to either take unpaid leave or under perform. Mother's need paid leave. We need to invest in our future. We need to invest in women's unique life trajectories.

Lisa, Baltimore, MD

I am an American who is married to a man from Sweden and we purposefully chose to have all three of our children there though

I missed my family in the US. The reason: 13 months of paid maternity/paternity leave. Sweden also has the best maternal and child health outcomes in the world. Mothers are able to successfully breastfeed for the internationally recommended 6 months without having to worry about how/where to pump when they return to work.

Six months of breastfeeding prevents many infections such as respiratory and ear infections that effect infants in day care settings. Fathers also have an opportunity to spend time with their children since the maternity/paternity leave is often split between parents. I hope that American families will one day have the right to live in a truly family-centered country.

Maya, Baltimore, MD

I am extremely fortunate that my employer offers up to 6 weeks of paid maternity leave and allows workers to extend that further by using vacation and sick leave. Because of this, I was able to be home with my children for the first 10 weeks of their lives. My daughters could nurse when hungry, and I could build up a small supply of pumped milk to send with them to daycare. Best of all, the leave time allowed us to get past those initial sleepless nights so that I am not prone to careless mistakes on the job or fatigue on the way to or from work.

Without paid leave, pregnancy and parenthood would have been unthinkable instead of a joy. Paid parental leave should be a basic right for all workers. All people should be able to choose parenthood without putting their livelihood at risk. I was very lucky. But it shouldn't take luck to give children a decent start or to give parents a chance to recover, bond with the new child, and return to the workforce as productive as ever.

Elizabeth, Silver Spring, MD

I am one of the fortunate minority of women who currently has access to a small amount of paid maternity leave provided by my employer. It is not sufficient to cover my household expenses during my maternity leave, but given the terrible leave circumstances that most women face in the U.S., I am thankful.

However, my career has still been significantly negatively impacted by the lack of federally-supported paid maternity leave. Because women are required to work at an employer for at least 1 year to qualify for FMLA benefits (and in most cases, any paid leave that is privately offered by employers) I have had to put new job opportunities on hold because of my desire to have a child. I recently received an excellent job offer – one that would constitute a significant promotion. But, because I am expecting a child, under FMLA I do not qualify for any maternity leave (paid or unpaid) in the new position.

I have had to put my career change on hold because there are no government laws to protect me or my family during a job transition. My husband and I both hold graduate degrees and we have very comparable earning potential. However, because I am physically responsible for carrying and bearing our children, my career is punished by childbearing in a way that his is not. Government-supported paid maternity leave is essential to creating equity in the workplace.

Michelle, Severna Park, MD

I decided to take a break from my career when my husband and I started our family. Partially because I'd always believed that a child deserved your best, not a strangers and partially because with the lack of any paid leave and the cost of childcare when I returned to work, it made more sense for our family

for me to give up the security of being an employee and try freelancing in what little time I'd have in my new full-time position of Mom.

Khalilah, Windsor Mill, MD

I had my daughter in 2007 and I was working full time shifts then. They were four 10 hour shift days with 3 days off. I used my 2 week paid leave and 4 weeks of unpaid leave. I did not feel this was enough to bond with my baby, especially since I went through a depressed period. I breastfed and had to pump at work, sometimes in the car. My daycare provider was on the other side of town, when I lived 8 minutes from work. I had to use sick and vacation pay so that I could have a workday that wasn't so long, of course this eventually ran out. I ultimately ended up quitting my job because I didn't feel that I being there enough for my child. I have been a stay-at-home mother for 3 years now, and even though I would like to work, it has been hard trying to get back into the field.

Deanna, Baltimore, MD

I had to take an early leave with my youngest due to complications with my pregnancy and was lucky to have a period of paid leave but it was not for the entire leave that I needed. My husband continued to work but with only one income it was hard. we almost lost our house and came close to the electricity being cut off several times. I am happy to say we are back on track now but it took over 2 years to get everything back on track.

Victoria, Hagerstown, MD

I was forced to return to work after only 2 weeks after my second son was born, I received a call from my boss at 4 pm and I was told he needed me at work, and I would be fired if I was not at work by 8 pm. I was still weak and my breasts

“...My career has still been significantly negatively impacted by the lack of federally-supported paid maternity leave.”

Elizabeth, Silver Spring, MD

leaked so bad my shirt was constantly wet. My son suffered also as I had to put him on formula which caused him repeated hospitalizations. What kind of society allows the bond between a mother and new baby to be broken so soon. Who benefits from this unfair system? Not our families that's for sure!

Michelle, Silver Spring, MD

I was fortunate enough to be able to take 12 weeks off with my first child and use a combination of Short Term Disability, paid leave, and unpaid leave to stay home for that time. But, I know that other families aren't so fortunate. Almost every ounce of research ever done shows that offering paid leave benefits companies and our society as a whole.

Heather, Timonium, MD

I was lucky enough to have 6 week paid maternity leave for both my kids. This provided me invaluable time to bond, adjust to parenting, breast feed on demand, and concentrate only on my newborn. I shudder to consider what would happen now if I found myself pregnant.

My new job does not provide any paid leave, and my husband (like

so many in this economy) is out of work so we would have no income if I took any time off. This means I would have to give birth and go back to work within a week as every penny counts if we don't want to foreclose on our house. Can you imagine how stressful to leave a week old baby. I would not be able to bond or breastfeed (pumping is not feasible at my workplace there is no privacy or time allocated). Giving birth is an amazing experience, but women need to be able to recover and get accustomed to being new mothers without the stress of lost incomes. It should not be only the lucky (with job benefits) and the wealthy who have this benefit.

Amy, Clarksville, MD

I worked for a large company when I was pregnant, so was very fortunate to have paid leave available. It was 'short term disability', and it wasn't 100%, but it was something. Now, my husband and I own a small business. I would love to offer paid leave to my pregnant employees (I now have 3!), but there is no way I can do it. We do not make lots of money; we are in the mental health field—insurance reimbursements are sub-par for mental health providers. But, if everyone were mandated to pay into a sponsored fund, then could draw from it for leave of this kind, then I would be all for it. Call it a 'PSA'—pregnancy savings account; tax-free, of course.

Donna, Damascus, MD

My husband and I are in the process of adopting a baby girl born in November. We got the call in early October and she was born 5 weeks later. I had 12 days of paid time off remaining for the calendar year which is what I used to supplement my FMLA (which is unpaid). I haven't been paid since mid-De-



ember when those vacation days were exhausted. We have relied on savings and family support to keep our monthly expenses paid.

Because adoption is not considered a medical expense, I am not eligible for short or long term disability. Other mothers who give birth can take advantage of this benefit (which I do pay for) and receive 2/3 of their salary. I, on the other hand, receive nothing. My company does offer an adoption benefit but it's not paid out until the adoption is finalized which could take close to a year. There are many many adoption expenses that adoptive families pay out to create a family that families bearing children do not. My husband and I have paid out \$40K in adoption expenses and the adoption is not finalized yet. On top of this, our baby's birth father who is in prison, is contesting the adoption so we have future legal expenses of \$20-40K that we need to come up with.

Michelle, Baltimore, MD

My husband and I were fortunate that we did not have fertility issues but that also left us totally unprepared when we found out we were having twins. I was fortunate to work for a company that went above and beyond FLMA. I received twelve weeks paid leave. Which was so important because my little darlings spent two weeks in the hospital before they came home. We still had 10 weeks together at home to bond and it was a relief that we had my full salary to help cover the cost of not one but two new additions to our family.

April, Westminster, MD

My son was born 7/2 of last year. As a federal employee, I had assumed that I would have the best family leave available to me. I was shocked to find out that the federal government offered NO paid

STUDIES SHOW THAT PAID FAMILY LEAVE AFTER THE BIRTH OF A CHILD GIVES KIDS A HEALTHY START



Sakiko Tanaka, "Parental Leave and Child Health Across OECD Countries," *Economic Journal* 115, no. 501 (2005) & Waldfogel, Jane "Understanding the 'Family Gap' in Pay for Women with Children," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, no. 1 (1998), 137-156

family leave whatsoever. As the primary earner in my family (my husband earns less than I do but not little enough to justify him being a stay-at-home dad) it was very very difficult to figure out how to save enough money to take unpaid time off from work. Through savings and going into debt, we managed to get me 3 months off – which was wonderful, though not nearly enough. Twelve weeks is far too young for an infant to be away from his mother. And as a result I am paying off several thousand dollars in credit card debt that was necessary in order to remain at home.

It is really a tragedy for our culture that there is no social support available for mothers who want to do the right thing for their children. I cannot imagine what it must be like for single mothers who don't have a second income to fall back on. I would not doubt that many women fall into a trap of debt and poverty right out of the gate – something that is expensive for all of us.

Colleen, Kensington, MD

One of the most difficult things for our family was that my husband only had 2 weeks of paternity leave (one of which was unpaid). He returned to work right when the baby blues were setting in and despite having live-in support from my parents, it was extremely difficult having my husband at work

all day. Consequently, I think not only do we need to think about paid leave for mothers but it is also important for fathers to be able to spend more time with their children during the earliest days of their children's lives.

Research indicates that children who have more involved fathers tend to do better cognitively and socio-emotionally because fathers and mothers interact differently with their children. In addition, I think the support that parents can provide for each other during the first few months of the baby's life are important not only for the baby but also for the couple's relationship – which indirectly affects the baby in that these parents may experience less conflict and may be more apt to stay together longer thus remaining a two parent family for the baby.

This support for each other and the baby is most likely strongest if the father is able to be home as well as the mother. These are important times of attachment-building, and this attachment needs to be built with the father, and is arguably even more important given that the father did not carry the baby inside him for 9 months.

Donna, Chevy Chase, MD

Paid family leave helped me recover from child birth and allowed me enough time to rest so that when I returned to work I was a productive and focused employee.

Jenn, Baltimore, MD

When my daughter was born last year, my husband and I decided that I would take 12 weeks of maternity leave. I work for a company that has less than 50 employees, so there is no regulated FMLA policy. I was the first person in the company's history to take maternity leave. My bosses were great in that they allowed me to take whatever time off that I needed, but they weren't going to pay me for that time.

Luckily, short-term disability picked up a couple weeks and then I had 3 weeks vacation (my entire allotment of sick and vacation days for the entire year) that I saved. So I was fortunate that I was able to get a portion of those 12 weeks with some sort of pay. However, now that my daughter is in daycare and constantly getting sick, I am using the little time off that I accumulate to take care of her. I am worried that I will not be able to accumulate that same amount of sick time for our next baby. We heavily rely on my income now to pay for her childcare.

I don't think we will be able to continue to pay it while I am out on maternity leave, and if I pull her from daycare, we might not be able to get her back in when I have to return to work. Life would be simpler if I just had guaranteed paid maternity leave.

MASSACHUSETTS

Andreea, Bridgewater, MA

Almost 8 years ago when I gave birth to my son I wanted to do the best I could to breastfeed for at least the first year. Unfortunately, after 3 weeks of unpaid leave from the job I had at the time, I had to go back to work and pump with a very bad and cheap pump, in the bathroom. My milk production went down the hill and soon we had to supplement with expensive

formula because the baby was lactose intolerant.

Lack of information at that time and support from the workplace, made me lose the milk after less than 3 months. With my second child I was fortunate to work in a big corporation and they have paid leave but only 5 weeks are paid, plus one week of sick time out of the 10 allowed. I had to go back to work after the 3 months at home and believe me it was even harder, it was heart breaking. I am now a working full time mom pumping 2-3 times a day for the past year.

My parents and mother-in-law are main helpers with the baby but it's so sad to miss the best years of our kids... I come home after 10 ours of being away every day and see him crawling or talking and I wish I'd been there to support him every second... But I can't....bills have to get paid. How can other countries afford pay for moms to stay home and take care of their kids for 1-2 years?

Brian, Easthampton, MA

Although I have no children of my own I am an obstetric nurse who works in one of the poorest communities in the state of Massachusetts. I routinely care for new mothers and families who have no

"I recently took care of a new mother who told me she had to go back to work two days after having her baby."

Brian, Easthampton, MA

paid family leave. I recently took care of a new mother who told me she had to go back to work two days after having her baby as her job with a cleaning company did not offer paid maternity leave.

How lawmakers think this is right is beyond me. These mothers and families need time to recover from the birth process and care for themselves and new babies without the fear of loss of income or their jobs. It is appalling to know that 177 other countries offer this type of care to their citizens, but the US, the richest and most developed is not one of these countries. It is time to get our priorities in order.

Diane, Brookline, MA

Before our first child was born I began saving vacation time, hoping that when the time came I would be granted permission to use vacation days to lengthen my time at home with my newborn. (I had no maternity leave or paid family leave – I had six weeks of sick days and short term disability to recover from having given birth!)

The good news is that I was granted that permission, giving me nearly three months of paid time off to care for our new child. I breastfed my baby, (even though I knew no one in my family or among my friends who had done so) which was a wonderful experience – until I returned to work and was faced with a 'must-go' five day business trip to Europe in the next two weeks. I am certain that having paid time off helped give our new family a better start: my husband had very little time off; we had no relatives nearby to help; and my breastfed baby was colicky for four months! I knew I needed my savings to pay for childcare once I returned to work. We were exhausted, healthy and very fortunate.



Marisa, Easthampton, MA

Family leave is especially important for families that have lost children too. Having recently lost my second son halfway through his pregnancy, I found it really helpful to have a job that was flexible with my return. However, not every parent has this luxury. Please consider that when a precious loved one comes or goes from our families, people need time to adjust and/or heal without concerns of job loss or pay cut or any further impact to their current situation.

Tamara, Arlington, MA

Having a baby is enormous physical work, not to mention hormone changes, emotions, and lack of sleep. I received 6 weeks paid leave and had saved up 6 weeks of vacation and overtime to take 12 weeks off, and to be honest that still was not enough. I did breast-feed. I breastfed both my children. A three month old baby however is tiny, and I think that it is still too early to send to a daycare facility. It was too soon for my son and I.

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Dorothy, Concord, MA

Having two months paid leave allowed us to plan and transition into child care. Our baby had a difficult birth, and we had follow up medical visits that would have

been very hard to do with our 50 hrs/week job. New parents without families nearby to offer time, help and advice is the norm these days. If children are a blessing, then paid leave should be a sacrament.

Daniel, Salem, MA

I am a father, but this issue is important for all parents.

“I am currently on FMLA to care for my elderly father following a hip replacement and also a horrible year of health challenges.”

Sonja, Somerville, MA

Charlene, Merrimac, MA

I am a mother of four, three daughters and a son. My maternity leaves were unpaid and made life difficult. One of my daughters will be delivering my first grand baby, a girl, in two months. She doesn't receive paid maternity leave either. Luckily, my daughter lives at home. Her financial load isn't nearly as heavy as most.

I will be the one providing care for my granddaughter while my daughter works. Having a baby is the single most perfect event in life. We shouldn't need to compromise anything with our children, especially the first hours, days, weeks of their existence. Children

are not toys. They are real live little people, with hearts. They should start being treated as such. When 'big people' get sick or take a vacation, hmmm they get paid! Sounds a bit unjust.

Liz, Wellesley, MA

I am a physician, actually an OB/GYN, and twenty years ago I had to bargain for more than the six weeks I was given. I had to pay myself during this time through productivity I had accrued before the delivery. I wanted to nurse my son and was exhausted as his schedule improved slowly. He was small and needed to be fed frequently through twenty four hours. I was still in a sleepless haze when I got a call from the only other female partner in the group telling me that they needed me to come back after 6 weeks. I had to say no. This was very difficult. They did not see why I couldn't just get a nanny to care for my son. I was determined to nurse until 6-8 months if possible. I needed the time at home.

If there had been an official policy I could have rested easy and been able to take care of my son as I felt I should. They would not have felt that they could ask me to to return. Amazing that even when working in a field of medicine that takes care of women there was still conflict.

Sonja, Somerville, MA

I am currently on FMLA to care for my elderly father following a hip replacement and also a horrible year of health challenges. He is independent again because of his health aides, visiting PT, and family. I live far away so I cannot assist my sisters and Dad but I can take FMLA to be a live-in, all-around care giver for a few weeks. I'm finishing up and going back home to my own family.

Elizabeth, Salem, MA

I counted myself lucky that in three years of employment, I took maybe 10 sick days total. I counted myself lucky that at my job, sick time and vacation time rolls over from year to year. I counted myself lucky that by the time I had my child, I had nearly 8 weeks of sick time, 6 weeks of vacation time, two personal days, and short-term disability that paid 60% of my salary after four unpaid weeks. I counted myself lucky that for three months I was able to receive my full salary to stay home with my son while recovering from a traumatic c-section (the anesthesia failed during surgery). I didn't have to worry about paying my bills or buying groceries or being able to pay my rent.

My husband was in graduate school at the time and, while he received a lot more in stipends than people in many other programs, it was far from a regular salary. If I hadn't received my full salary, we more than likely would have had to consider food stamps and welfare. But then in my state, being in graduate, dental, medical, or law school disqualifies families from those services, so it wouldn't even have been an option for us to seek public assistance. We would have been in some serious financial trouble. So, I count myself lucky. But I shouldn't have had to.

All new parents should be able to take time off after the birth or adoption of a child and not have to worry about keeping their jobs or how they're going to pay for groceries. PAID leave should be the norm. And should be required. I count myself lucky. I shouldn't have to.

Nicole, Waltham, MA

I had seven weeks of paid leave from my employer, one of the top 100 working mother award companies. In addition to the stress of having a new baby, my maternal grandfather and paternal grand-

mother both died during my maternity leave. The thought of returning to work was crippling; I was not sleeping more than two hours at a time. I called my doctor's office in tears, asking for additional paid time via a medical leave to no avail since physically I was 'okay.' I took an additional five weeks off unpaid because I could not find a daycare provider who would accept a baby under 12 weeks old.

Shortly after that, my husband was laid off and I had to work to maintain healthcare benefits. I returned to work completely sleep-deprived and pumped five times a day; three times at work. I figured if I couldn't be the primary caregiver for my daughter, I would minimally provide her with my breastmilk. I honestly have hazy memories of the first three months back at work. I cried everyday when I left, every time I pumped, and tried to hold it together the rest of the time to be a contributing employee.

It was not until my daughter was 6 months old that I felt rested enough to think and excel at my job again. I am appreciative of the 7 weeks that were paid, but I really feel the US should join most other nations and offer a minimum of 6 months paid maternity leave. Our nation's children are the future of our country and it is important to make them a priority. This would support the recent surgeon general's call to action to support breastfeeding. If you are able to be with your baby for at least six months, it is much easier to breastfeed for six months.

Jennifer, Marblehead, MA

I just had my second baby 6 months ago and I'm just coming out of the post-partum fog!

I was fortunate to have JUST enough time saved up after my 3 year old was born to take 12 weeks off from my job as a RN, but came back to work without any sick time.

There have been a couple days that I've been really sick but had to go to work because I'd otherwise go unpaid. That put my fragile patients and co-workers at risk, but was a choice I had to make. Both of my daughters suffered from severe reflux the first 4 months of life so almost all their waking hours involved crying.

When I went back to work, I was delirious with exhaustion, up all night and day. My job as an ICU nurse is not one that I can give less than 100%, so I was really burning the candle at both ends, and at risk for making a life threatening decision with my patients. But I had to go back because I did not want to lose the job I love.

Danielle, Cambridge, MA

I moved to the USA when my first child was about to be born. As a College Teacher in Quebec, Canada, I was able to take 12 months leave from work and to continue to receive 80% of my salary. When I discovered the work conditions for mothers here and particularly that the majority of them have no access to paid leave after the birth of a child, I was absolutely shocked. I could not believe that the work conditions of mothers in USA were so far from the norm in the rest of the develop countries.

We women are counting for 50% of the labor force. The fact of the matter is that paid family leave helps give kids a healthier start and gives families the economic security they need to stay out of poverty at a critical time – and at the same time it can benefit businesses' bottom line. This saves everyone – from parents to taxpayers to businesses – money in the long-run. I would add also the impact on health cost when mothers and children have a healthier quality of life. I was not so lucky for my sec-



ond child with no paid maternity leave, we start struggling to stay afloat and in good health. We had trouble to effort the preschool of our older son and our family day life became more stressful.

I would like every member of Congress to understand the importance of paid family leave after the birth of a new baby. That is primordial in our today society.

Tamara, Arlington, MA

I received 6 weeks as per the leave act. Six weeks is not long enough as I learned once I gave birth. The baby is still tiny and I only began to recover by that point. Luckily I had accumulated overtime and vacation time so I put in 6 weeks of my own for a total of 12 weeks. In order to have a healthy workforce and healthy families, I think our leave act should be 12 weeks. Even then the baby is still so small but at least better than 6 weeks old! Most industrialized countries offer a minimum of 4 months, and most are 6 months or more. These months are not that long in a lifetime of an employee.

AnnMarie, Springfield, MA

I was fortunate to have paid leave. This should be the rule, not the exception. Otherwise you put the most vulnerable of children in a situation that could harm them.

Kate, Lowell, MA

I was lucky, I had my baby at the end of the year and was able to use all of my 4 weeks of PTO towards my 'maternity leave'. Unfortunately, my company offers no short term disability or provides any monetary help for women on maternity leave (can't blame them, it's expensive to run a business). I had an emergency c-section so as soon as I was back on my feet, I was back at work missing my little one. I was out two

weeks of pay and had a deductible of \$1000 to pay.

Emotionally, it's hard. You desperately miss your child, making you feel depressed and your worried about keeping up with your bills which adds anxiety on top of the depression. Nothing like crying your way to work each morning. No person can do a good job at work when dealing with those type of emotions. It is against nature to leave a 6 week old at home while you sit at a desk for 9 hours.

The toughest part is seeing women who are on every public assistance program available living a pretty sweet life and being able to watch their child grow. It makes no sense that I work hard, pay taxes and when I need help so that I can better the life of my child, I get nothing from the government.

Rebecca, Boston, MA

I'm self-employed, so there was no option of paid leave. I'm fortunate enough that I could save some for maternity leave, but I went back to close to full-time after 8 weeks and was completely full time within a year. I have enormous flexibility being self-employed, but on the other hand, if I don't work I don't

"Paid family leave helps give kids a healthier start and gives families the economic security they need to stay out of poverty at a critical time."

Danielle, Cambridge, MA

get paid, so it has it's draw backs. It was especially hard as I don't live near family, and with my mother already passed away when I had my child, there just wasn't that kind of support.

It would be WONDERFUL if we could devise a system where even self-employed people could get paid leave – perhaps by paying into an account with matching funds... one can dream no?

Rebecca, Cambridge, MA

If we value our children – and they are ALL our children – we must make paid parental leave the law of the land. I was lucky enough to be a full-time homemaker when my children were born, but I can't begin to imagine how I could have kept up with my job if I had had to take unpaid leave.

I think both mothers and fathers should be eligible for paid parental leave. It's the very least we can do for our children – and again, they are the children of our nation, so the children of all of us.

Ana-Maria, Littleton, MA

It's important to me because I had a twisted pelvis, numbing/tingling painful back issues plus post partum depression along with a 10 day old baby that had unnecessary surgery and hospitalization. Even though I had doctor's notes from literally 4 doctors, I was denied an extension to my leave and subsequently depression took much longer to combat.

Amanda, Boston, MA

My baby boy was born 16 months ago and I was lucky enough to have a job that promised me my job would still be there when I came back but did not have paid leave. It was hard for my husband and I. We had really hoped he would be able to spend a week or two at home with us help-

ing and being there for the first weeks of our baby's life—but the reality was that he felt guilty about not being at work and they put pressure on him to be at work and he only ended up being home with us for 3 1/2 days. I took 8 weeks off and would have loved to take more time but I felt guilty and pressured not to be gone from work for toooooo long and we were not in a financial situation where we could afford for me to be out of work that long.

As it was we saved and saved and saved as much as we could so that we could afford for me to take any time off. And did the time ever fly... I still can't believe it went by that fast or that I 'got so few things done'. All of my time was caring for our newborn (or relishing the few precious bits of sleep I could have while he napped). It was hard and it was stressful to worry about work and money while I was home and I wish we had been in a situation where that hadn't loomed over our new happiness.

Donna, Lexington, MA,

My children were born in 1978 and 1981. With the first child, I quit my job so I could stay at home; with the second child I returned to my part-time job after six weeks. I used sick and vacation time to cover the six weeks as I recall. In the current climate, asking businesses to cover paid maternity leave, I believe, is an impossibility.

With a 20-something daughter of child-bearing age, I am already highly suspicious that employers are discriminating against young women who may plan to have children. Any further demands on the businesses, I think, may make this even worse.

Heather, Canton, MA

My daughter was born with a rare birth defect called tracheo-esophageal fistula and an accompanying esophageal atresia (TEF/

LESS THAN 63 PERCENT OF MOMS

WITHOUT ACCESS TO EITHER
PAID OR UNPAID
MATERNITY LEAVE
RETURN TO THEIR
SAME JOB POSTPARTUM



The Effects of Paid Family and Medical Leave on Employment Stability and Economic Security. Heather Boushey and Sarah Jane Glynn, April 2012

EA). Kestrel required a life-saving surgery with the first 24 hours of life, and another two surgeries within the first three months she was alive.

Needless to say, I was out of work for all that time, as well as numerous other times. I did not get paid leave. It is impossible to describe the financial impact this had on me at the time. Aside from trying to pay the bills and keep food on the table, I had to pay for daily parking at the hospital for the time she was in intensive care, and for all of the subsequent appointments and hospitalizations she had over the first three months of her life. I used up all the money I had spent the past five years saving and was still crawling out of debt almost a year later.

Those three months easily cost me upwards of \$18,000 in expenses, with no income to offset the expenses. To be so stressed out about finances while dealing with such an overwhelming situation as almost losing my firstborn child was almost emotionally crippling.

Erica, Randolph, MA

My employer does not provide

any paid maternity leave, and my husband got 1 whole week of paid paternity leave. So, I drained my bank of sick and vacation time to stay home for 12 weeks. When I returned to work full-time, I had no way to take half-days or days off when my baby got sick or even needed a routine pediatrician visit.

And of course, I was breastfeeding because this is best for my baby, and had to find a place to 'hide' at work 3 times a day, lugging that pump everywhere. It is NOT RIGHT that this is a typical experience for a mother in the United States.

Cheryl, Plymouth, MA

Not having paid time off after the birth of our first child totally wrecked my husband and I financially – and when you have a newborn, getting three hours sleep a night is a lot, so it's not like returning to work was an option for me...I was so tired I was afraid to get behind the wheel of my car to drive to work. To make matters worse, after my son had been in daycare for a year, I was actually forced to take unpaid leave by my employer because my son was constantly sick enough to need to go to the emergency room more than a dozen times.

Teresa, Middleboro, MA

This is one that is near and dear for me since I am currently on leave after having my third baby, a miracle that we thought would never happen. I wish we could afford for me to stay home permanently but it's not to be, so we decided for me to just take the 12 weeks I am allowed under FMLA. Even this is an extremely difficult thing for us financially since I am not being paid during this leave.

Our family will be without the extra income of over \$10,000 for



the 12 weeks I am out on leave. Not only has this affected my immediate family, but it has also affected my mother as she recently became unable to live on her own and her children have all come together to find a place for her to live with some assistance. As much as I need to and want to, it is nearly impossible for me to contribute much to this cost since we are barely making it with my income and now have 3 months without my income as well. FMLA is a great thing but it should be expanded to allow mothers on leave to be paid during that time. Its a tough enough decision to have to work as a mother.

Margaret, Brookline, MA

Turns out having and raising a child is the hardest thing I've ever done. It pales in comparison to every other difficult thing I have done – medical school, residency, medical fellowship, getting a PhD and running a marathon. Not even close. Providing paternity or maternity leave is an investment in our country. Help get families off to the best start possible.

Uma, Taunton, MA

When I got pregnant with my second child, I had recently started work with the federal government so I had little vacation/sick leave saved up. So I was able to use 3 weeks of leave with vacation and sick but the rest was unpaid leave. Luckily, my husband and I were able to save enough money that we could survive for this leave but it was tough.

I know that there are a lot of families that have little/no savings and can't afford to be out of work unpaid. So in addition to the stress of having a new baby and adjusting to these changes, a financial burden is also added to the family. I believe that our primary focus should be on the well being of our children and families and having paid leave would

allow these families to take this important time to care and bond with their new baby without the added stress of being out of work.

We talk a lot about the importance of our children and families but when it comes down to making decisions, it does not appear that they take a priority over the financial decisions of businesses. Let's start putting our priorities back on our families.

Meghan, Somerville, MA

When I had my daughter, I had 6 weeks of pay at 60%–short-term disability, and then 6 weeks of no pay at all. My husband I were able to make due, but when the time came for me to go back to work, I was distraught. I had to work because I carried the health insurance for myself and my daughter, and we could not afford my husband's family plan.

I was very concerned about going back to work because my daughter was waking up every 90 minutes. My job was an hour commute each way, and a 9 hour day. The thought of being out of the house for 11 hours and then coming home and not getting more than 2 hours of sleep at a time was terrifying. I begged my job to let me go back part-time, but they would not agree. Finally, they just let me go, realizing that I would be miserable and my husband and I made budget cuts and I had COBRA benefits until I could find work closer to home. I was finally able to find work when she was 7 months old.

I would have so appreciated a part-time return option, it was really impossible to go and function 45 hours a week with the level of sleep-deprivation I still experienced.

Carter, Westborough, MA

When I had my first child I had a very difficult time nursing but I knew breasts milk was the best

choice for my daughter and I was committed to making it work. In order to do that I had to pump then put the milk in a bottle with a tube leading from it so my daughter would get milk when she nursed even if she could not get it directly from the breast. After feeding her and getting her to sleep I had to clean the equipment and pump to get ready for the next feeding. In the beginning when my daughter was feeding most frequently this took up the majority of the day.

Without maternity leave I would never have been able to offer my daughter this healthy start and give her an opportunity to learn to breast feed. If I had not had maternity leave I would have been forced to give my daughter formula. This is just one of the many benefits I feel my daughter got from my being able to be home at first.

Erin, Cambridge, MA

When I had my first child in 2006 I was laid off while pregnant. This turned out to be oddly lucky as it allowed me to file for unemployment and extend my health insurance, at the subsidized by my employer rate, beyond my daughter's birth. I was able to apply for new positions from home while nursing and diapering my little girl without having to worry about how we were going to pay our rent or buy groceries. I was called for an interview 4 weeks after having my daughter. The interview process was slow but I ultimately received an offer and was able to start back to work when my daughter was 4 months old.

I still have no idea how we would have made it through that time if I not been laid off. My husband owns a small business, and purchasing our own health insurance that way was as unaffordable as buying it through COBRA. Our daughter would probably have needed to go into full time daycare at 6 weeks, the earliest age possible at the nearby daycares,

so that I could return to work. After using my vacation and sick time (roughly 3 weeks), I would have had to take the next 3 weeks without pay and cover the full cost of our health insurance out of pocket.

Laura, Weymouth, MA

When my husband and I decided to start a family, I stopped going on vacation and I scheduled my pre-natal visits and other health appointments on evenings and weekends so that I didn't have to take a sick day from work. My place of employment allowed FMLA leave for the birth of a new child, and so I had no problem whatsoever requesting 12 weeks of leave from my job. However, my job did not have any paid leave, and I was mandated to use up my sick days first, and then my accrued vacation time, to pay for the leave.

After doing the math, I realized I needed sixty days of available 'time' in order to pay for a basic maternity leave! Anyone who has actually taken a vacation, or stayed home with a 102 fever knows that accruing 60 days of unused leave in one's early career years (the years in which childbearing is most likely to happen) is difficult. And in today's two-income household, with mortgages taking up huge percentages of income, I don't know anyone--even in my highly educated, middle class group of peers -- who can take unpaid time off from work.

To have healthy children, healthy families, and healthy futures, we need a minimum of 12 weeks of paid leave for new parents so that every parent can be guaranteed to have at least the basic chance to start their children's lives off right.

Don, Attleboro, MA

When our daughter was born, my wife was able to stay home with her for three months. I can't

“As a father, I would have loved the opportunity to spend more time at home after birth... There's nothing more important.”

Don, Attleboro, MA

imagine not having this right. Our daughter now attends daycare, and when I drop her off in the morning and see babies only weeks old, who should be home bonding with a parent, it saddens me. As a father, I would have loved the opportunity to spend more time at home after the birth; I ended up using some vacation time. There's nothing more important.

Thalia, Acton, MA

With unpaid leave for myself, and unpaid leave for my husband, we managed to keep our son at home for the first 2.5 months. Once he started going to daycare--a good daycare, with caring people--he started getting all kinds of illnesses at such a young age. It was extremely stressful, and a negative medical impact.

MICHIGAN

Susan, Redfor, MI

A breastfed baby needs it's mother and access to it's mother's milk, so that they can establish a good nursing relationship. It is not fair to either of them to separate them too early. I have given birth

to 6 children and have breastfed all of them. If I would have had to pay for the cost of formula my husband and I would have gone broke.

Michele, Ann Arbor, MI

All Americans should have the option of paid family leave. I've worked at the same university for 13 years now. And thank goodness they have a paid extended sick where I could take off with pay to take care of my two newborn children. Moms (and dads if they need to help) should not be worried with figuring out how to pay the bills if they are not blessed to have paid family leave. Everyone should have this option.

I heard that in Canada new moms can take off a year after their newborn arrives. This paid family leave should also apply to anyone with sick family members or if they are experiencing a major illness and needs to be out of the office.

BobbiJo, Twin Lake, MI

As a mother to a 4 year old child, it is pertinent that we get paid maternity leave. When I had my son, I was fired from my job because I needed the time off to take care of my son.

At the time, his father wasn't working, so we had to rely on his grandparents to get us through until I could find another job. Some people don't have this support system. If they can't keep their jobs when they have a baby, how are they going to be able to support it?

Ellen, Grand Rapids, MI

At the age of 40 I had my first baby by C-section. I had to return to work 2 weeks later! Just saying.



Dr. Cinthia, Brighton, MI

Having paid family medical leave was essential for the well-being of myself and my baby and it is essential for the health of my patients and their babies.

Childbirth is traumatic for mother and baby much of the time and both need rest and healing. newborn babies throw a wrench in the whole family's routine and need non-stop attention and care in order to thrive and grow into healthy and productive members of our society. Stressing out mom and baby by expecting her to leave her baby to work is wrong and foolish. Mom will be unproductive, distracted and distraught and baby will languish. It is unacceptable not to have family-protecting policies in our land of freedom and promise.

Gretchen, Grand Rapids, MI

I am fortunate enough to work as a professor and to have had understanding administrators so, when my son came 6 weeks early, I was able to have maternity leave and had even banked time so I could be paid. I don't know what I would have done without that leave given his need for constant care and many doctors' appointments. My son's father, on the other hand, had a hard time getting even an extra day to be with his son. We need family leave for all the women who are not as lucky as I am and for all the fathers who should be able to participate in their children's care in order to give those children a healthy start in life.

Kim, Dearborn, MI

I did get paid maternity leave when I had my daughter last year but I only got 6 weeks off and I am paid hourly at my work and any employee that goes on maternity leave gets paid \$200.00 a week no matter what you make. I also could take 6 more weeks by the FMLA

STUDIES SHOW THAT PAID FAMILY LEAVE AFTER THE BIRTH OF A CHILD LOWERS INFANT MORTALITY



Sakiko Tanaka, "Parental Leave and Child Health Across OECD Countries," *Economic Journal* 115, no. 501 (2005) & Waldfogel, Jane "Understanding the 'Family Gap' in Pay for Women with Children," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, no. 1 (1998), 137-156

but they would of been unpaid and I would of had to use all my vacation time I had up first to use any of this.

I only got 6 weeks home which isn't enough and it was hard taking a newborn to daycare. I didnt use any of the FMLA because of the little money I made the 6 weeks I was gone, this made paying our bills hard losing my income like that and stressfull at a time we really didn't need extra stress and I didnt want to lose all my vacation and have nothing to use during the year.

Angela, Ypsilanti, MI

I feel both lucky and incredibly cheated that I was able to take 12 weeks off when I had my daughter. I know not everyone in this country is that lucky but I also know that just north of my home in Michigan Canadian mothers enjoy a year of paid maternity leave. My daughter was just starting to get really fun – responding and smiling so much more when I had to return to work.

My heart ached those first few months when I was away. She's almost 2 now and I still have days where I feel I did a lot of things but none of them particularly well. But in the beginning that happened more often than not. Youth today have a lot to contend with and could really benefit from spending those early months with their parents.

Yodit, Ypsilanti, MI

I found out I was pregnant less than two months after starting a new job. We'd tried so hard to get pregnant and yet it couldn't have come at a worse time. I remember cowering at the idea of having to tell my new boss. I, of course, had no vacation time as yet. Heck, I didn't even have health insurance. And NO, the company didn't have paid maternity leave as part of its' offerings. Once I did get the courage to tell, my supervisor and I talked about options for when the baby would be born. The company agreed to me to 'banking' the 17 days of vacation time I would earn in the first year – I still had to fight with the HR person who insisted that I had missed a loophole in the policy that stated I had to take half the time in the first 6 mos. of employment and only wanted to give me 9 days off.

Wow, three weeks and two days with the baby. I couldn't imagine what I was going to do about nursing, day care, recovery time (as it turned out, I had an emergency c-section) or even being able to keep my job (what if they changed their minds?). Just out of sheer urgency and a deep and abiding maternal instinct to be home with my first baby for longer than 3 weeks and two days, I negotiated a part time work arrangement with the job and figured we'd just take it from there. Now I had to figure out health care for the baby and I.

I couldn't afford the family plan at work and didn't qualify for coverage yet anyway (as a new employee) nor could we afford the policy my husband's co. offered.

By divine intervention I remembered that at one time I'd paid into a supplemental short term disability plan with my previous employer. Could I still use that? Well, it turned out, I could. Who knew that pregnancy qualified as short term disability? That would afford me another 6-8 weeks depending on the type of delivery – PAID. I couldn't have been more joyful! What I wanted, more than anything, was to be with that baby.

Heidi , Farmington Hills, MI

I got to take off nine weeks for maternity leave, but was only able to do so because I had paid for short term disability and only for that long of time because I ended up having a c-section. Had I had a normal birth I would have been back to work in six weeks. I worked as much as a new mother could from home. Add that with the stress and emotional roller coaster that being a new mom is, and I can tell you it was no relaxing nine weeks at all.

I am now pregnant with my second child, wondering how I am going to manage logging in work hours at home while on maternity leave to pay for my medical while on leave, with a toddler and a new born in the house. Plus the added expenses of daycare when I do have to return to work. Having a baby should be a joyful, family experience. It's stressful enough having to take care of another human being, let alone trying to keep your job and log in time so that you're not slapped with the premium costs for your medical upon your return. My boss is very understanding, thankfully. But I still feel the pressure and the pain of leaving for a long period of time, both with my work and my family.

Lisa, Portage, MI

I had 6 weeks of paid maternity leave with both of my children in the 1980's. Why was that time essential? Without pay, I would not have been able to take off more than 2 weeks with my children. During those six weeks, I recovered from the health stresses of pregnancy including recovering from pregnancy-related high blood pressure, insomnia, acid reflux and joint pain.

But most importantly, my babies were breastfed for the first essential period of their lives, felt loved and cared for, and bonded with me, while I learned how to care for them and meet their needs. This time was the foundation of their happy childhoods because of the closeness and love that developed in those first weeks of their lives. Having this time was a gift to all of us that could not have been successfully replicated in any other way. My only regret is that my husband could not have had this time like I did. Paid parent time with newborns benefits everyone and should be available to everyone.

Barbara, Shelby Twp, MI

I remember how important my paid leave was when my children were born over 40 years ago.

Barbara, Cadmus, MI

I took FMLA leaves on two occasions. In 2000, I used it to take care of my mother. It was unpaid and so was my health insurance. It took over 2 years to pay the company back for the health insurance payments. In 2009, I used FMLA to care for my husband. It gave us time to sort out our choices and decide how to handle his care with Parkinson's. I took an early retirement. He passed in 2011. The leave was unpaid and so was my insurance. Both times, the leave gave me valuable time with my family. I wish FMLA leave had been available when my kids were born or at least when they were sick.

Joy, Eastpointe, MI

I was a graduate student when I had my daughter. Because of my excellent academic record, I won a year-long fellowship the month she was born. This allowed me to stay home with her and not go back to work. This turned out to be a Godsend because my daughter developed severe colic at three weeks old. Her acid reflux was so bad that if she was not held completely upright at all times, she was in severe pain and would scream. We quite literally could not put her down for 9 weeks. I slept sitting up, holding her. Bouncy seats and car seats were not upright enough. I had no one who would come over to help with her, so my husband and I did it all ourselves.

Jennifer, Plainwell, MI

I was a single women pregnant for the first time. I had full insurance benefits and paid vacations with more than 4 years on the job. However I had to leave work at 8 months because of my doctor recommended due to physical stresses of the job. I lost my insurance and had to on state aid (Medicaid). I used up all my savings and my only source of income came from the government (Welfare). Thank the lord it was available because had this not been available I don't know where we would of ended up.

I think if my employer had been able to offer paid leave I would of been able to make my savings last and been able to return to work and be able to pay for a babysitter.

Tawnya, Canton, MI

I was in a very unfortunate situation when I had my son. My husband died suddenly two weeks before I gave birth. Losing his income and potentially not having any income during my leave, would have



put me over the edge. I'm fortunate that my company offers a voluntary disability insurance program that I pay into. It gives me 60% of my pay. It was a tough time, but it would have been much worse without it.

The sad thing is that not everyone I work with can afford to pay into that insurance. You never know what the future has in store for you. It would be nice to know that paid family leave for all is one less thing to worry about. Remember that you do not know the life circumstances of your constituents. Think of worse case scenario and how you can make it better for all.

Angela, Royal Oak, MI

I was lucky that my company offered short term leave for 56 days and 6 weeks paid leave if vaginal delivery, 8 weeks for C (I was pregnant with twins and had to go on leave 16 weeks before my due date). I ended up having the girls 9 weeks early so my short term ended and maternity started. I did have a C section and received 8 weeks pay and that was it... We did plan for our babies and saved a bit. I was offered my job back if I returned within one year under the FMLA and I did return part time but was later laid off due to lack of work in Michigan/Automotive Industry.

The care and cost of twins/day-care and/or nanny, work expenses, etc. was more than we could handle so I decided to become a SAHM. I had a friend who had a baby a few months earlier but since she had only been with the company for 7 months she did not receive any compensation.

Jamie, Davison, MI

I work at a dental office. I had a baby girl 3-5-10. I had a 3 week unpaid maternity leave. I feel like a missed out on bonding time and breastfeeding.

Melissa, Lansing, MI

In 1997, I was pregnant with twins. I had pre-clampsia and pre-term labor and was on bed rest for 7 weeks before they were born. I then had serious complications when they were born, and almost died. Still, I returned to work after only 9 weeks. Why? Due to company policy, my entire 16 week leave was unpaid. I couldn't afford to take any more time off – we had astronomical medical bills, and two newborns to feed.

“Thanks to the 12 weeks of paid leave I received from my employer, I was able to get my baby started right with breastfeeding...”

Maurine, Hillsdale, MI

I ended up with serious mental and physical issues due to all the stress. While a paid leave wouldn't have changed my physical situation, it would have alleviated the mental stress and strain caused by all the health issues and worry over our finances. Instead of enjoying our new babies, I spent most of their first months freaking out over money. In the United States of America, the richest country in the world, this is inexcusable. Working moms and their families should not have to go through what I went through.

Amy, Bloomfield, MI

My daughter was born 8 weeks premature and spent a month in the NICU after suffering a collapsed lung within the first 24 hours after she was born. I was incredibly blessed to have paid maternity leave and good health insurance at the time. I was able to be at the NICU advocating for her care every step of the way, and I would not have been able to do that without paid maternity leave. It made a huge difference in an incredibly critical point in her life. It also took a huge burden off of my shoulders.

If I had needed to be working during this time I would have been distraught at the thought of my daughter in the hospital without her mother by her side. Once she came home I was grateful for the opportunity to be able to be with her non-stop for several weeks before I returned to my full time job.

C., Troy, MI

My daughter was born 9 weeks early after I was already on bedrest for 4 weeks. She ended up in the NICU for 36 days. The large Automotive company I worked for as an Engineer gave me a 6 week leave and told me I must come back to work after the 6 weeks were up or be let go (since I had used 4 weeks on bedrest already). How could I? The baby had just come home from the hospital 1 week earlier, only 3 pounds with tons of feeding issues. I had to quit.

Gretchen, Grand Rapids, MI

My leave was crucial to the health of my son: he was born prematurely and my ability to stay home with him for the first six weeks of his life made all the difference to my ability to nurse him (so important for a preemie) and to care for him and get him to all sorts of doctors' appointments. Neither he or I would have been as healthy

as we were without that crucial full-time stretch together.

Maurine, Hillsdale, MI

Thanks to the 12 weeks of paid leave I received from my employer, I was able to get my baby started right with breastfeeding and reading to her from the very first day. Having those three months to get started helped us to keep it up once I was back at work by establishing a schedule and finding the best pumping method. My daughter breastfed for a full year, and has had text read to her daily, and is now at the top of her class and is rarely ill. That might not have been the case if I'd had to rush back to work right away, or if I'd not had a supportive employer that made sure I had a place to pump milk and a flexible schedule once I was back on the job.

Patty, Livonia, MI

There is no reason why a woman should go back to work with a 3 week old baby! There is so much crucial bonding that takes place in those first few months of life, there is no replacement! Not even Dad! Only Mom can breastfeed. Only Mom smells like Mom. Only Mom sounds like Mom. It's heartbreaking that Mom and baby have to be separated at all!

Adrienne, Lansing, MI

When I had my son in July 2010, I had short term disability coverage that paid a portion of my salary for six weeks. After that was up, my employer allowed me to use my remaining vacation and sick leave, along with unpaid leave to make up another 6 weeks before returning to work. We had saved a few thousand dollars, and it was depleted by the time I received my first paycheck after returning to work. I had to negotiate with my employer to have them continue to pay for insurance

coverage, although I still had to pay a portion of it when I returned to work. It was very, very, difficult financially and that caused additional stress during maternity leave and upon my return to work.

I also returned to work with just enough sick and vacation time left to take my child to well baby visits and vaccination appointments. I am grateful I was able to save money to cover maternity leave and that I had short term disability coverage for at least part of the time. Otherwise, I could not have stayed home for 12 weeks and that would have definitely impacted my ability to breastfeed and bond with my child.

I have one friend who ended up having to return to work after six weeks and decided not to breastfeed, and another who ended up quitting her job because she had to return after six weeks. I feel pretty lucky, but it could have been better, and I do wish I could have stayed home longer. I would really like to see universal paid maternity and paternity leave that lasts at least 6 months.

Rebecca, Detroit, MI

When my daughter was going through the process of adopting her girls, she used leave time for the home study, psych visits and etc. Should she have quit her job or not adopted the children with out the availability of family leave? Think about it.

Jacqueline, Lake Orion, MI

When our daughter Evaline was born with Down Syndrome, not only did we have the usual new baby work ahead of us, but we had more difficulty nursing, and no pediatrician for her when we left the hospital. We needed to find her a doctor, educate the rest of the family, deal with my PPD, and take care of the many appointments that accompany a C-section.

MINNESOTA

Laura, Minneapolis, MN

After both my daughters were born, I was able to take time off of my teaching position but once I used up the few days of sick leave that I'd acquired, the rest of my leave was unpaid. This meant that we scrimped and cut coupons and all that was necessary to make it work since going back to a full time teaching position while having a tiny newborn (or a newborn and a 2 year old) would have been bad for me, my baby and my students who deserved a teacher who could give them their all when there. We were fortunate that my husband had a job and that we had learned how to live frugally when serving our country in the Peace Corps.

Amanda, Bloomington, MN

For the last five years, I have been commuting 3 hours per day. I have a wonderful job, and I feel blessed to have a job in this economy at all, but it's not been easy. When we found out that we were expecting our first child, I saw how quickly my priorities were going to need to change.

Right now, I have found that my hands are bound. I cannot look for a job closer to home without losing my leave benefits, which would mean having to take unpaid leave when my daughter is born. Additionally, I spoke with our HR representative, only to find that, if I were placed on bed rest, by a doctor, I could use up my protected leave (FMLA) BEFORE my daughter is born. Thankfully in Minnesota, the law give me 6 more weeks, if that were to happen. That means that I would have the minimum amount of time that doctor recommend that women take to heal from child birth. If I had a C-Section, I



would need to go back BEFORE the minimum amount of time doctors recommend to heal. Doesn't that seem ridiculous? It barely give us time to adjust to having a baby, let alone time to bond and get used to being parents.

Now I am trying to find affordable daycare that will be open for long enough and I am anticipating having to rush back to work with minimal time off. That way I might be able to use my vacation time to leave early daily so that I can afford the daycare. It is so frustrating to know that I will not be able to provide my daughter with the attention that she deserves right after she is born. It is amazing to me, that, as Americans who have such a focus on 'family,' that we spend so much time prioritizing working over the well being of the children born into our families. I am well educated and we live in a two income family. Both dad and I are fully employed.

How do we expect families to survive if they aren't in our situation? America is broken, and we have an opportunity to foster an environment that allows parents the ability to heal properly and to take proper care of their children while still paying their mortgages and other bills. Isn't that good for the economy? Isn't that good for the future? Let's do better.

Leslie, Brooklyn Park, MN

I am a mother and a barber. I never had more than 4 weeks off after giving birth, (and no paid time off). I had only 2 weeks off after my second child was born and only 3 weeks after my third child's birth. I think it was really inhumane to expect this of anyone. I did manage to breastfeed all my children but it was a huge struggle. It is time for the US to catch up with the rest of the developed countries of the world and give our children the best start possible in life.



NEARLY HALF OF WORKERS EXPECT TO NEED TO PROVIDE ELDER CARE TO FAMILY IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Kerstin Aumann and others, "The Elder Care Study: Everyday Realities and Wishes for Change" (New York: Families and Work Institute, 2010).

Toni, St. Paul, MN

I am a school bus driver and mother of three boys. After the birth of my last child I took three months off from work, unpaid. Thankfully my family made the sacrifice with little complaint, but we SHOULD NOT have to sacrifice! I work hard for my paychecks, I volunteer in my community, I also run a nonprofit that exists to help families in my community. We need to support families! Mothers and fathers should have paid leave, period.

Erin, St. Paul, MN

I am taking a six-month unpaid leave of absence for my maternity leave. We are running up credit card debt, but my employment, which requires I spend all day visiting clients or in the car, would not allow for pumping of breast milk without taking a significant pay cut (I get paid by how much I can bill for my services). I theoretically could have pumped in the car, but in the middle of winter in Minnesota, I did not see that happening.

Our financial situation is not ideal, but the first six months of my daughter's life will only happen once, and I am committed to breast-

feeding her for the first six months. Furthermore, although I have two Master's degrees, I am in a low-paying, woman-dominated field (social work), so my income after child care expenses will not net us much anyway. I am planning to go back to work in a few months primarily for my professional growth and in hopes of eventually earning enough to make working financially worthwhile in the future.

Mona, Starbuck, MN

I did not have paid leave when we had our first child. Due to complications from a c-section, I had to take extra time off. That was 28 years ago and that unpaid leave affected our finances then and continues to affect our finances now. I was not able to retire at the usual retirement date due to the time I had taken off. It also lowered my retirement benefits. I was surprised to see how many countries provide for a paid leave and we here in the United States do not.

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Leslie, Forest Lake, MN

I didn't have any paid leave, but at least my spouse did. With our first child, I decided to leave work, as it was grant-funded & would end soon, rather than return to work a couple more months & jeopardize breastfeeding. This made me ineli-

gible for any unemployment benefits, despite that I've sought work since.

My spouse was able to use accumulated sick leave for 6 of 12 weeks FMLA allowed by law – he could use another 6 weeks of vacation for FMLA, except that his employer (federal agency) said it wasn't necessary for care of mother & infant after vaginal birth, & wouldn't grant it, altho he had enough vacation accumulated to cover it. It has been the same with the birth of our second child.

We've made financial sacrifices so that I may be home to care for our children & breastfeed as long as possible. I think my spouse should be able to set aside \$5K tax free (dependent-care savings account) to pay me for this work so that he may work, same as any other outside childcare facility. My work at home is not valued whatsoever.

Annie, Minneapolis, MN

I gave birth in an Israeli hospital to twins by C-section and most recently, a VBAC. In both cases, I was granted a sum of money (several hundred dollars, doubled for the twins) to get us started with our new baby, along with paid maternity leave for 3 1/2 months and optional unpaid maternity leave for an additional 3 months.

Women who have worked for the same employer for a number of years are, in fact, entitled up to a year's unpaid maternity leave. I was paid 85% of my full salary, and for the rest of my three children's lives as minors, will receive approximately \$100 a month directly deposited into my bank account. Though this \$100 is not much, it certainly is better than nothing.

My children benefited from time with their mother, and I was able to recover from the birth naturally, on my own time, and continue nursing my children. Of course, I did not have to pay a cent

for my children's births (and this would be the case whether or not I was employed), and I got nothing but top-quality care in both cases. Israel is far from being the best country in terms of its healthcare and childbirth benefits (we could learn a good deal from Sweden or France, for instance), but compared to the United States, the wealthiest country in the world, it sure is miles ahead in its care and concern for the health of families. It baffles me that a country of such resources is unwilling to provide basic benefits for families. No wonder the crime rate is among the highest in the world.

Sharon, Minneapolis, MN

I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy on September 28, 2010. Though I loved my job, I worked for a small employer with no option for any kind of a paid leave. Furthermore, the hope was that I would return six weeks after the birth of my baby. So, I did the thing that made sense for my baby's well-

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Sharon, Minneapolis, MN

being and my sanity: I quit. I knew I couldn't breastfeed and care for my son adequately if I tried to return to my stressful job after only six weeks.

My heart goes out to the all the women who do so! I am now an unemployed, WIC recipient on Medical Assistance. I graduated with honors and a 3.75 GPA from college. I have a Master's Degree and worked in my field. But I am now officially in poverty because I decided to have a child – and made choices that prioritize my baby's physical and emotional health over financial security and status. I am fortunate to be partnered and have the basics covered (housing/ food etc). But my school loans are in deferment, we have gone down to one car, dropped cable, dropped our cell phones and use a landline. I struggle to make my credit card payments.

If I had a paid leave that was LONG enough to establish breastfeeding I would have considered keeping my job and returning to work. But since I've had to quit, I'm considering staying unemployed longer... and yes, will continue to use the resources that I qualify for: WIC and state insurance. Would it cost the nation less in the long run to provide paid leave? Seems to me like it would. I'd be back in the work force and earning enough to provide for my family. Instead, I'm home with my precious boy, nursing and doing laundry and trying to survive on 2 hour stretches of sleep!

Cinnamin, Lindstrom, MN

I gave birth to my first baby in 2007. I had to endure a c-section and was not able to get help or any assistance paying for my surgery and/or hospital stay. I opted to take 12 weeks off for recovery and healing. I was not allowed to get paid



for any of it from my employer. I was not allowed insurance from my job to help out with any bills.

My husband and I not only had this new wonderful baby to take care but we also had to take care of all my bills and our new insurance for me and the baby on one salary. We lived pay check to pay check and now will have to do the same when baby number 2 comes along in August. It would be nice to have some type of help with baby.

Kyra, Minneapolis, MN

I had the luxury of being home for nearly two years after the birth of my first son – it was amazing! My husband was laid off and I went back to work while he stayed home with our son. With our second son, I had to pay for short-term disability to be able to have some income for six weeks after his birth. Since when did being pregnant and having a child become a disability!? It's clearly a sign of how little our society cares for women and children.

The night before I left for work, I held my baby and cried. I was going to leave him in excellent care with his daddy, but leaving for work that next day was still one of the hardest things I've ever done. I can't even imagine the anguish if I would have had to leave him in the care of strangers. I don't know that I could have done it. Unpaid leave is not enough – we must offer paid maternity and paternity leave. The research shows the importance of attachment, both for the parents and the baby – time spent together is not wasted time!

Susannah, St. Paul, MN

I have a nearly-five-year old son, and a daughter due to arrive in late March. I'm a self-employed writer and editor, and I've worked almost full-time for the same client/employer for about 5-1/2 years now. While this employer has been generous

about retaining my gig for me while offering a few weeks of leave – the notion of *paid* maternity leave, for myself or my spouse, is something we've longed for, and that we know is treated a basic safety net offered to new parents virtually everywhere else around the world – but it sure feels like a pipe dream in our lives.

My husband is cobbling together a bit of vacation and sick time (which amounts to two weeks off for him to stay home with me after the baby's born); I'm going to take about three weeks off before I begin working again. We simply can't afford to go without paychecks any longer than

“I was fortunate enough to have 12 weeks off, however the financial stress of not ‘working’ had an impact on me and my family.”

Melinda, Forest Lake, MN

that. After some of the stories I've heard from friends and fellow parents, I'm just glad I get to keep my job. I honestly can't believe this is how we treat families and children in the U.S.

Andrea, Andover, MN

I have two children and when I was pregnant with each my employer allowed me to save up my vacation / sick time and use it towards my maternity leave. I had five weeks of short term disability insurance that paid out at 100% of my take home

pay and my saved up vacation time supplemented this and allowed me to stay at home for two months total. After that, although I wanted to use the four remaining weeks allowed to me under the Family Medical Leave Act, I had to go back to work, because I could not afford the unpaid medical leave and had to begin paying for child care so that I could earn money to pay other bills as well.

I've been very blessed and am not complaining. It's a travesty in this country that we do not support families more fully. Allowing mothers to, during those crucial first months with their infant, stay at home and recover, while also encouraging them to breastfeed, would save tax payers millions in health care savings as mother and child bond, and the child receives human manufactured nutrition that helps their immune systems throughout their lifetime and saves the family money not spent on formula, not to mention the health benefits to the mother that chooses to nurse (reduced risk of diabetes, cancer, etc.).

And what about fathers? They wake up at 3 a.m. when the baby cries, too! Everyone needs time to adjust to the change a new infant brings into a family's routine. Moms need Dads there to take a break. Dads need time to bond with their babies, too! We need 'true' Family Leave that focuses on the needs of families.

Melinda, Forest Lake, MN

I was fortunate enough to have 12 weeks off, however the financial stress of not 'working' had an impact on me and my family. Having to return to work because of financial reasons was a hard decision to make.

Mattie, Minneapolis, MN

I was very lucky to have had eight weeks of paid leave from my

job, with the option of combining vacation, sick and short term disability time for another four weeks – which I took. Now that I am back at work we cobble child care together with the help of a relative, a paid sitter, and my husband and I. I don't know how we would have done it if I had had to return to work right after our son's birth – not only was my body not ready, but he wouldn't have been able to establish good breastfeeding and sleeping habits, and I would not have the skills and experience to read his signs and cries.

Moreover, I would not have had that incredibly precious time to fall in love with him and just enjoy being a mom. I am so thankful for the leave I did have – though I wish it were longer – and I believe every family should have this opportunity. It's important for the health, well-being and happiness of an entire new generation.

Susannah, St. Paul, MN

I work as a freelance editor and writer. Forget paid family leave – I didn't even have access to unpaid leave. I simply took a couple of weeks off when daughter was born nearly a year ago, I started working again after just three weeks. I'm a key contributor to our family's budget; if I'm not working, we can't pay our mortgage and other fixed expenses.

There is no safety net for working people in my situation, no guarantee of a job waiting for us at the other end of even six weeks' worth of maternity leave. Thank goodness, my husband works for the state of Minnesota, so our family has access to good medical insurance through him. When I consider the situations of other women I know – entrepreneurial, self-employed, hard-working mothers – I count myself really lucky. At least with my second child, there were no complications for us after or

during birth; no c-section, no serious recovery to contend with. When my first was born, however, he came unexpectedly six weeks early. Between a week of bedrest at the hospital, and three weeks for the baby in the hospital after delivery, followed by a month of worry over a very small preemie – I didn't pick my freelance work up again for two months. We're still paying off the credit card debt we accrued then – and my one-time preemie son just turned six last week.

When I read about the months and months of support for families in other countries – in both the developed and still-developing world – I'm appalled at the way we treat parents and babies in this country. I cannot believe, in a country so prosperous, that we can't do better than this.

Sarah, St. Paul, MN

When my daughter was born 5 years ago, I was able to use my PTO until my short term disability kicked in for my maternity leave. I worked up until the day before I delivered and was able to take off 3 months between the PTO and ST disability. I was very lucky to have had a very healthy pregnancy and an employer who did offer these options, although I bristle at the idea that having a baby makes you disabled!

For me, I cannot imagine having had to go back to work as a first time mother after only 6 weeks of leave – 3 months was essential, a year would have been better. The first year of life for a baby is so essential and so important, but most mothers cannot financially afford to take off as long as they truly need to care for their baby.

Denise, Minneapolis, MN

When my son was born in 2003, my husband and I decided it was important enough for me to be

home during the first few weeks of his life that we would use our savings to live and cover costs. I ended up having a c-section and was therefore eligible for short term disability for about six weeks after his birth. After using the mandatory week of vacation/sick time, I took the disability and then used up remaining vacation time combined with time off with no pay to enable me to stay home a full twelve weeks.

I needed this time to recuperate from surgery and begin to make the adjustment to parenthood. Having decided to breast feed, this time was vital to establish patterns and work into the new routine. When returning to work, I spent about 30 minutes twice a day locked in an office with my breast pump. My employer happened to be cooperative and allow this routine for about six months until my son was done breast feeding. I know many employees aren't so lucky and the breast feeding time is cut short when babies need it most. I am grateful that we had savings to allow us to have this time together.

MISSISSIPPI

Heather, Tupelo, MS

I am a working first time mom. My 'maternity' leave consisted of my two weeks paid vacation time I had saved, two weeks of sick time I had saved all year, and 8 hours of built up paid time off (PTO). I then took an extra 2 weeks unpaid leave because I had a cesarean and needed the extra time to heal before lifting 50 lb trays in surgery where I work.

I currently live in one of the poorest states in the United States, I work in A HOSPITAL, and I barely had any benefits or rights. I would



have been fired for being pregnant if I hadn't been here as long as I have, and this is a fire-at-will state. I had to rush back to work and could only breastfeed for 3 weeks as I dried up from not having the time to work with baby.

We NEED family leave to be paid, or at least to be entitled to a portion of our wages for at least the first year. My only issues are the mothers out there living off the government that never got jobs and got \$9,000 in taxes for their three kids, whereas I busted my behind WHILE pregnant and barely got 8 weeks leave before I had to rush back to make money to pay bills and only got \$2,000 in taxes filing JOINTLY.

Felicia, Southaven, MS

When my daughter was born, I had to use what little vacation time I had to pay for the time I was off work. I was off work for 6 weeks, but only had enough vacation to cover 3 weeks. So I was without a paycheck for 3 weeks. It was tough and it took me a while to catch up from the lost wages. The U.S. is supposed to be one of the most sophisticated and progressive nations in the world, yet third world countries have better maternity leave than we do? There is something desepately wrong with that.

MISSOURI

CB, Saint Louis, MO

For both of my daughters I used all the paid vacation and sick time I had accrued, and then I took the remainder of my 12 week leave unpaid. This is the standard for everyone I know. Some women were refused the possibility of having ANY unpaid leave, but were forced to go back to work as soon as they used up

their accrued vacation/sick time. When I took my unpaid leave, I was reminded that as I worked in a small company, they were not required to meet the minimum maternity leave standards, but did so to demonstrate that they were 'pro-family'.

My job was held for me, but after the birth of my second child I was unable to negotiate working even one day a week from home, so I very reluctantly quit a job I loved and that had a great future so I could raise my own children instead of turning them over to someone else 40 hours a week. We went to a one-income family. Every woman I know plans her pregnancy to include significant financial hardship due to the loss of one income. We plan our employment status and future around the possible impact of a child. Negotiating vacation and sick days become critical in job-hunting, as it's the only way to reduce the hardship.

Most women go back to work whenever their vacation/sick time is used up. And then they hope that nobody gets sick for at least 90 days. Not one woman I know has received paid maternity leave!

Hilary, Columbia, MO

I did not have paid maternity leave. We foreclosed on our home one month to the day of my daughter being born. Cause and effect? Tough to say, but knowing that we would have a certain period of time without my income greatly impacted our decision to stop paying the mortgage so we could have money on hand to care for our family, pay other bills and keep some semblance of financial security.

My partner is in construction and he had very little work due to a slow building winter. He dissolved his business and picked up work with colleagues as much as possible. I was placed on bed rest at 32 weeks

due to signs of premature labor. I took FMLA for the bed rest, but FMLA only secured my position at my company, it didn't help us in any way financially. We bled our savings dry while trying to stay healthy and keep up with some of our bills. After my daughter was born ten days after her expected due date, we were exhausted of nearly all our resources. We moved when the babe was three weeks old into a rental and I prepared to go back to work in another three weeks.

I was lucky enough to have a great supply of breastmilk and a quality pump to use at work. My daughter is 19 months and we are still struggling to get on our feet financially. We have sacrificed many things to raise our daughter to be healthy and happy. Should it really have to be a sacrifice? Mothers should be respected in this country; offering paid parental leave is very important in showing this to mothers.

Nancy, St. Charles, MO

I had paid maternity leave with my daughter. It was twelve weeks of paid time. I was so grateful that I had time with my baby and didnt have to stress out about money. I think every family deserves some kind of paid time to spend quality time with there new baby.

Susan, Kansas City, MO

I thank God that I was able to stay home on 12 weeks of paid leave when my son was born. Thanks to this gift, I could establish a solid breastfeeding routine (still breastfeeding at 11.5 months), pay my bills, and learn how to effectively take care of a newborn. I can't imagine how I would have been able to manage if it weren't for this benefit. My spouse had to use all of her vacation days to be able to take 3 weeks off to help at home. We could not afford to take any unpaid leave.



WOMEN WHO TAKE PAID LEAVE REPORT INCREASED WAGES WITHIN A YEAR OF THEIR CHILD'S BIRTH COMPARED WITH WOMEN WHO TOOK NO LEAVE

Linda Houser, PhD "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public," A Report for the Center for Women and Work, January 2012

Betsy, Kansas City, MO

I was one of the lucky women who could scrimp and save so I could stay home with my children. Paid leaves for parents is just good common sense.

Cathy, St. Joseph, MO

I was shocked to learn that I would not get paid during my 6-weeks medical recovery time after the birth of my son on July 4th, 1991. My employer told me he didn't even have to allow me the 6-week medical time, so I better just be thankful he was going to be nice enough to let me take the time without pay. I was devastated. I was scared. I wanted to nurse my baby and bond with him. A co-worker told me I shouldn't breastfeed because I'd leak all over the place and besides she couldn't wait to get back to work after her son was born. I felt like there must be something wrong with me.

I told my husband I wanted to quit my job and he was worried we couldn't pay our bills. I told my mom I wanted to quit my job and she said I had no right to put that kind of pressure on my husband. She said life was not the same as it was in the 60's. I had to work, so I quit nursing my baby after only one week because of my fears and went back to work when he was only 6 weeks old because I had no other choice.

Thankfully, I found a book by Dr. Brenda Hunter called, 'Home By Choice'. I read her book everyday at lunch and cried everyday. My only

support to make the important decision to bond with my baby came through the words on a page. I'm so thankful President Clinton signed the Family Leave Act, so I was able to have a full 12 weeks to bond with my daughter born in 1993. And thanks to the support I found in a book, I very proudly quit my job on July 22nd, 1994.

My son will soon graduate with his Chemistry degree and my daughter will graduate from High School this May. My other two daughters are doing well in school. All of my kids will be positive contributors to society because they have parents who cared to bond with them and be actively involved in their lives. I now work full time again for a Swedish owned company. When I learned Swedish colleagues get a full year to bond with their babies, I decided Americans need to do a better job to nurture our families and create laws that protect families in order to build a stronger America. Every mother and father deserve the option to nurture their child from birth as well as paid days for sick time for their child.

Erin, St. Louis, MO

I work with many breastfeeding mothers who have trouble returning so soon to jobs because they need the money and they have no paid maternity leave. Breastfeeding a newborn is a full-time job in and of itself taking on average 7-8 hours of breastfeeding time/24

hours. This is breastfeeding time only: each breastfeed takes 20-40- minutes each and the newborn, up until around 3 months of age, usually needs 10-12 breastfeeding/24 hours. The time it takes for the other care needs of a newborn is extra time spent. If breastfeeding is not done often enough then the mother is unlikely to succeed with breastfeeding and will wean early. I see this all the time in my work.

Since the USA is promoting breastfeeding and our 2020 goals are to get breastfeeding rates up, it makes since that we NEED to have a national paid maternity leave so that breastfeeding can get off to a good start!

Jeanne, St. Charles, MO

I'm a single mother I had 3 children and their father basically abandoned them. Why is Paid Family Leave important? I think it speaks for its ownself - Why should children be abandoned by both parents? I haven't received a paid vacation in over 15 years, haven't been on unemployment a day in my life. I worked day and night to provide for my children - while the father went his own way. Who would have to take off work without pay to provide for my sick child? How many employers should a mother have to go through that will allow her to care for her children?

The sad thing about all of this is even after this goes into law - there will still be employers that won't hire single mothers! Leaving women and children subjected to abuse by strange men in order to support them! Bottom line is WE are being kept down by the lack of equal pay, lack of paid leave and yet the abandoning fathers of these innocent children are allowed to emotionally and physically abandon them - without penalty for the years of



neglect. Is there any question as to why this Paid Family Leave should be LAW? There is no question. Pass it.

Juli, St Louis, MO

I'm so incredibly grateful that I work for a school district that gives paid maternity leave! I'm a first time mom with a 7 week old baby girl and I can't imagine the last few weeks if I would have had to work. My baby is a really good baby (compared to some of the stories I've heard). She's not colicky, breastfeeds well, doesn't cry without reason, but like a normal baby, she needs constant attention.

Aside from the fact that childcare is a huge expense, if I'd put her in childcare from birth, there's no way I would have learned all that I have in these last 7 weeks. There's no way I could have continued breastfeeding her and both my and her quality of life would have decreased dramatically. I still dread the day I have to go back, in about three weeks, but I'm comforted by the fact that my husband, who also gets paternity leave, will stay with her until the end of the school year.

Melissa, Imperial, MO

My daughter was born two months premature in April of 2009. She spent 3 weeks at the hospital before coming home with us. 3 weeks later, my office was calling to say that my short term disability was over and I needed to return to work. Never mind that I was physically in no condition to return to work, never mind that my daughter had only been home for 3 weeks, and never mind that HER doctors were saying 'NO WAY' to group care until she was at least 12 weeks old.

I ended up taking another 6 weeks of unpaid leave, as it was in her best interest. We are STILL trying to recover financially – 6 weeks

of unpaid leave on top of medical bill after medical bill – we maxed out our out-of-pocket on insurance co-pays that year for both my hospital stay and hers, not to mention the additional bills we incurred because she was a preemie needing additional doctor visits, RSV vaccine, etc, etc. Paid family leave could have made all the difference to us. It is astonishing that we consider ourselves so 'advanced,' and yet we have no paid family leave.

Skylar, Springfield, MO

When my son was born, I was fortunate enough to work at a place that offered 1 week of paid leave. The rest of my 12 weeks was a mixture of vacation, sick leave and unpaid time off. I started back to work in the winter with an infant in daycare and no time off to deal with a sick baby or doctor's appointments for my child, let alone myself. From that point on I was constantly struggling to build up any kind of sick leave.

Any leave that I earned had to be saved in case my son got sick, which means I went to work sick, even when I shouldn't have. Having paid leave would have saved my sick leave for when I returned to work, and that would have allowed me to take better care of myself. Taking better care of myself would have allowed me to be a better mom and a better employee.

MONTANA

Wendy, Bozeman, MT

I believe the United States' lack of support for working mothers to be a dirty little secret that no one really knows about until it happens to them. During the birth of my second child I held a good paying scientist position at one of our nation's top public universities. However,

the amount of paid leave I had was only the amount of sick and vacation leave I had stored for that year of employment, which amounted to less than two weeks. I had worked at that institution for only a year which is why I hadn't been able to build any more leave than that.

As a young career woman, I followed my husband on his career path to postdoc so I wasn't able to build any kind of long term employment at one institution during that time. I was allowed to take 6 months of unpaid leave as my boss agreed to hold my job for me. However, unpaid leave when the other spouse is in a postdoc position is not enough for a family of four. While I am not a person that believes strongly in large government subsidized programs, I do believe that our country needs to take care of its working mothers more like much of the rest of the world does, perhaps looking at Europe's model as an example. While it does reflect a more socialized system, I believe that when the U.S. invests in its families through working mothers, our entire country will benefit and there will be less of a breakdown in the family unit.

Many mothers are at the beginning of their careers and unable to have stored any kind of long-term leave, which is why having no program for them is so damaging. I felt like I was punished for having my children at a younger age (26 and 28) before I was able to build leave rather than waiting into my 30s when I would have had more leave stored up. Not at all a fair or just situation.

Patricia, Great Falls, MT

I feel so fortunate because I got to have ten months with my first baby and 18 months with my last; in that time, we bonded, and I am more sure every day that without that bonding time, they wouldn't have turned out as well as they did. They were smart kids; they both could read before they entered

kindergarten; they went on to be national contestants in speech and debate; they both earned college degrees; they both have great jobs that they wanted; in short, they had a great start with parents who devoted time and energy to them.

Parenting is the hardest job I ever did, and I can't imagine how much harder it would have been without that good start. Everybody deserves time to bond, to get well themselves, to be established as a family. We, in America, are backwards in our approach to maternity leave – many European countries provide six to twelve months with partial pay for working mothers. My time was without pay, but I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

Jennifer, Missoula, MT

I have two beautiful children. I had one week off after my son was born and I had 1 day off after my daughter was born or I would have lost my job. I know that having paid time off is essential. I also had to work the day my Father died in order to keep my employment.

Beverlie, Bozeman, MT

Kyle was born on 10-23-83 he was born by c-section. I worked until I went into labor. It was 56 hours of labor and he was stuck in the birthing canal. Believe it or not 50 years previous we both would have died. I had to write several letters to get the time off. I taught first grade at the time, lived 10 miles from West Yellowstone with no neighbors, had to ski or snowmobile a mile to our car in sub-zero temperatures. The closest hospital 90 miles away through a treacherous canyon which could take you anywhere from an hour and a half to four hours in one direction. Roundtrip, 3 to 8 hours and that doesn't include the time you need to see a doctor or get fresh vegetables. Time with your children

“Becoming a mom was the most challenging thing I've ever done and if I'd had to worry about finances on top of trying to figure out how to care for a baby, I would've been completely overwhelmed.”

Melissa, Missoula, MT

when they are young is essential. Time for Fathers as well as Mothers. There is no more precious time spent on earth.

Lisa, St. Ignatius, MT

My daughter was 11 weeks premature, and so required a 6 week hospital stay. Fortunately for us, my husband and I were employed in Germany and so, although she was born in Montana, we fell under the laws of the EU. Not only did I receive a salary for the year of maternity leave I took after her birth, my husband was also able to take 2 months of paid leave within the first year, allowing him to return to see her in the States and accompany us back to Berlin. We believe what we gave her that year has made a huge impact on her development and our connection as a family.

Melissa, Missoula, MT

When I had my first child, Owen, I had a job that paid for maternity leave. Becoming a mom was

the most challenging thing I've ever done, and if I'd had to worry about finances on top of trying to figure out how to care for a baby, I would've been completely overwhelmed. Thankfully, I had 12 weeks to get to know my baby, care for my baby, breastfeed and ultimately, decide whether I could stand to leave my baby at the end of maternity leave and return to work. I decided I could not leave my 12-week old baby with someone else and left my job. I've been home with Owen ever since, and he is now almost 3.

Women should not be forced to choose between caring for their brand-new babies and going back to work too soon. 12 weeks in a babies life is the blink of an eye, and it is the most important time in a mother and baby's life. If we as a country do not show mothers that they have value, what does that say about us? MANY other countries have amazing maternity leave policies. We really should do more to support mothers (and fathers) during this incredible transition. Lastly, I will say that I experienced some post-partum depression.

ANYTHING that eases the load of a new mother helps reduce the risk of having post-partum depression. If I were worried about money, it would've just added that much more stress to an already difficult (yet wonderful) situation.

NEBRASKA

Bambi, Omaha, NE

I was getting ready to have my 3rd son. I had discussed with my boss that I would be required to take more time off to attend doctors appointments for the last month of my pregnancy but that it appears I would be induced so I



could plan the date I was having the baby. I did not want to lose my job and so I discussed potentially taking maternity leave early so that they could cover my shifts temporarily. I was assured everything was fine and a week later, 2 weeks before I had my son, I was fired and told that they could not afford to hold my position while I was away having my baby.

It could not have been a worse time to lose my job as I had 2 children and getting ready to have my 3rd. If paid leave had existed, they would have been required to allow for my leave instead of making it permanent. No one will hire someone 2 weeks away from having a baby. So instead, we made due the best we could by cutting back in expenditures. It is sad that not only is there no pay, but often times, jobs and benefits are lost with the experience. This only adds to postpartum depression as having a brand new baby is stressful and then mount money and family worries on top of it and you have a sure fire recipe for disaster. Please help families to make having a child memorable in a positive way. It seems they are being punished for growing their families.

Alison, Omaha, NE

Please make life better for young parents and young children by making quality daycare and paid parental leave standard in the U.S. In my family, we marry young (between age 18 and 22) and have our small families while we are young (before age 25). We have used birth control for generations, and we plan each child. Raising kids with healthy minds and bodies, a strong work ethic, and the spirit to think for themselves has always been important in my family.

So when a woman in my family has a baby, we don't work. As soon as my mother found out she was pregnant, she quit working. I de-

MORE THAN
30 PERCENT
OF WOMEN
WHO HAVE TO
CHANGE EMPLOYERS
AFTER GIVING BIRTH
EXPERIENCE A DROP
IN THEIR PAY



U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Maternity Leave and Employment Patterns of First-Time Mothers: 1961-2008," (Washington, DC: Department of Commerce, 2011).

ecided to not work until my children started grade school. But none of us has been wealthy enough to do this. We were all at poverty level, but we scraped by to spend quality time with our kids rather than risk them growing up without the capacity to bond with other human beings. And we didn't want to put our children at risk around strangers in our absence, through the substandard daycare that was typical when I was raising my children. Quality daycare is crucial, and many young parents must work. More of us would work when we have young children if quality daycare and paid parental leave were standard.

My daughter and I have put ourselves through college after we had kids. Today I have 3 undergraduate degrees, and my daughter is a special education teacher in public school – she is working on her masters. We are hard workers who sacrificed years of income to insure our kids had proper care when they were young. Please make life better for young parents and young children by making quality daycare and paid parental leave standard in the U.S.

Danielle, Kearney, NE

I am a stay-at-home mother of three great kids, all under 5. I wasn't able to get paid leave for any of my children. After our first, my husband and I swore I would stay at home and we would be fine. Nope, didn't happen. My income went and so did our hopes of prosperity! So I went back to work when our son was only a month old so we wouldn't get evicted.

Baby number two, again went back to work but this time after the standard 6 week leave. I actually ended up not making a penny for almost 3 months due to owing for our health care benefits while on my unpaid leave which sent up into a bad financial spiral. With our last child, who is only three months old, I had built up some sick time and used that along with all the vacation hours I had available from my job as a store manager. Still didn't get us very far after the hours were used up within a month and we still had to pay out for our health insurance. After the hours were gone and things looked bleak, I ended up putting in my resignation and I am, as stated above, now a stay at home mom.

Money is beyond tight. With each child we have gotten a little more behind because with the increased cost to raise our family we lost money from me not working while recovering from childbirth. We are responsible people, those who paid for our health insurance and took care of our selves instead of living off of the government and it ended up making us worse off. So now guess what? My family has to rely on help from the government to survive. Paid family leave just makes sense. Having a child is supposed to be the most joyous time in your life so why is it that the US makes it one of the most stressful? Why are we penalized for having babies? When families need money most, they get nothing. Is that right? What would you say, what would you do if that family was you?

NEVADA

Shana, Las Vegas, NV

I am one of the few privileged people in this country actually able to use FMLA to take a full 12 weeks off of work following the birth of each of my 2 children. I worked with my organization long enough to have accumulated sick leave and vacation time so that I could receive full pay. As fortunate and privileged as I am, even 12 weeks didn't feel like enough time. My babies needed me, but as the primary income-earner in my family I needed to work to support my family.

Annette, Henderson, NV

I had my son in 1979. I worked for Eastman Kodak Company and at that time all, or most companies paid 6-8 weeks of Maternity Leave. It was a given. I had complications, had to stay in the hospital for 10 days after his birth and had bed rest for 3 weeks after that. All it took, at that time, was a phone call to Kodak from my doctor and my paid leave was extended for 3 months.

If I didn't have that afforded to me, I don't know what I would have done. I can't imagine a woman giving birth and not having time from work for bonding with her newborn, time for her hormones to get back in sync, and the time just to heal and get her strength back. In my opinion, we have become a society of greed...and mean-spiritedness.

Cristen, Henderson, NV

I had to earn my sick leave as school teacher and I tried to plan my pregnancy for summer. I ended up taking a leave of absence for a year, no pay or affordable insurance and I couldn't go back to the same school when I returned. Having children is the most important thing for our community, but we

don't help each other out!!! What happened to it takes a village?

Melissa, Las Vegas, NV

My daughter was born 2/26/12. I was 'lucky' enough to have worked long enough at my job to be ensured three months off and have a job to return to. Leave with my company is unpaid and the premiums for health insurance have to be paid by me during my time off. I fortunately had hardly used any of my paid time off that had accrued and was able to ask for six weeks off.

Unfortunately, my daughter had to spend seven weeks in NICU. So, in order to be with her and have six days with her at home I took an extra two weeks of unpaid leave. My PTO was calculated and paid to me incorrectly so I actually had two pay periods where I did not receive pay and am now paying out a little each paycheck to cover the weeks where my premium was not paid. This in addition to seven weeks worth of NICU treatment and currently five doctors and one in-home nurse that I have to pay for. So, I must work full-time at a crappy job making very little money to pay for not only our everyday bills, but for the privilege of having a baby that also now has special needs and I can hardly spend any time with at all (as well as time away from a six year-old too) because our country is so far behind when it comes to family leave. My daughter can't even have breastmilk anymore as it has dried up due to being unable to pump at work.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Esther, Sanbornton, NH

My daughter had a difficult time breastfeeding at first. I spent the first month of her life with recur-

rent mastitis and painful, bleeding nipples. Finally, when she was four weeks old we discovered she was tongue-tied and had it remedied. Still, it took several weeks more for her to learn to nurse properly and comfortably. If I had not been able to take an extended maternity leave, I probably would not have been able to continue breastfeeding. This would have been detrimental to her health and to my feelings of success as a mother.

Rhonda, Manchester, NH

My story has a happy ending, despite the fact that FMLA does not apply to any business that employs less than 50 people in NH. My employer is a family man who owns his family's business. Even though he was under no obligation to offer me Maternity Leave, he generously gave me the full 12 weeks....unpaid, but 12 weeks with a guarantee that my job would be in place when and if I wished to return. For that and many other reasons I will be forever grateful. He was also kind enough to give me a 'bonus' to help defray some of the lost income. It wasn't as much as I would have earned while working, but it was a lifesaver. He was not required to do any of this under the law. I have no complaints as my boss went over and above what NH requires for maternity leave (which is next to nothing).

I was able to bond and establish a strong breastfeeding relationship with my baby due to the time I was allowed. My only complaint is WHY are there so few paid and unpaid provisions made for new mothers and fathers at the NH State level?

I appreciated EVERY day of the 12 weeks I received as I don't think I opened my eyes until week 6. This was a time in which some of my fellow moms were required to report back to work.



Janine, Milford, NH

When I had my baby I was not going to let anything interfere with her (and me) getting the health and emotional benefits of breastfeeding. Pumping at work eliminates the emotional benefits, plus it would be mostly impossible at my job.

I had to quit. There would always be jobs but there would not always be a baby who needed me. Fast forward a few years and I am working part time, we entered the Home Affordable Modification program to avoid foreclosure, we have compiled large credit card debt, family members have bailed us out at times, and we are still scraping by.

My daughter will not be going to preschool with her peers because we can not afford it. Paid family leave would have allowed me to start off with income and keep a job to return to. That would have us in a very different position today.

Heather, Derry, NH

When my second son was born, I hadn't accrued enough vacation days to allow for a 12-week paid maternity leave. My husband's salary couldn't support our growing family; missing even a month's paycheck would have made it impossible to pay even our most urgent bills.

So, I spent the weeks before and after his birth desperately trying to negotiate with my employer, trying to find a way to care for my baby while maintaining my paycheck. This was emotionally draining at a time when I most needed my mental resources. Luckily for me, everything worked out in the end. But luck should have nothing to do with it. None of that should have happened to me, and none of it should happen to the women of America.

NEW JERSEY

Marisel, Midland Park, NJ

A child is not ready to be separated from his or her mother at 12 weeks. A mother is not emotionally ready to leave her baby either. It is very difficult to find affordable, quality child care for a child of that age. Many companies and small business do not have a place for a mother to pump milk when away from the baby so the mother is banished germ filled to a public bathroom to do so.

“Paid family leave would have allowed me to start off with income and keep a job to return to. That would have us in a very different position today.”

Janine, Milford, NH

Sara, Roselle, NJ

As an employee of the State of New Jersey, I was eligible to receive Family Leave Insurance for a period of twelve weeks after my disability insurance had expired. All in all, I was able to stay home for three months after my son was born. However, my disability / FLI benefits were only 2/3 of my regular pay and our family struggled to make ends meet during this time. We still are not back on our feet (18 months later).

While I consider myself lucky to have been able to bond with my son for as long as I did, it breaks my heart knowing that in other countries, new moms are given longer periods with better benefits to stay home with their newborns. My son was exclusively breastfed for the first six months of his life and continues to nurse today (though, as a busy toddler, he is much less interested in 'na' than he once was). I do feel that our time together contributed greatly to our successful breastfeeding relationship but I also feel that the support I received from my family and from my local La Leche League chapter made it possible.

Giselle, Maywood, NJ

I am fulltime working mom and just this past year in September I had a baby. Luckily, thru my employer and the state of NJ I received paid Family Leave. This was a blessing for me because I had 12 weeks to first of all recover from a C-section and also bond with my new baby. Because I did not have to worry about where my income was coming from to support my two other children, I was able to have a good pregnancy, delivery and recovery period.

Now I am back at work at my current position that I had when I left. I also have been able to find quality daycare for my baby which I most likely would not have found if I had to rush to find someone. I CANNOT imagine having a baby and rushing back to work right after because lack of income. That would have only caused stressed for myself, my baby, and my family. I probably would have been forced to make a decision that would have negatively affected my family. I believe that every parent should have an opportunity to enjoy the first weeks of their baby life without the added stress of money and job security. The statistics are sad and disappointing. Something has to change in this country.

Tara, Robbinsville, NJ

I am lucky enough to have a partner who can support our family while I and take care of our two boys. It is invaluable to have one of the parents home with thier children, particulary during the first year – for bonding, health, safety and everyone’s well being. Contribution of employer to insure every parent has a chance for paid leave is imperative to raise well-adjusted and secure children who will one day grow up and take over.

Megan, Bernardsville, NJ

I can’t imagine life without paid family leave or maternity leave. The thought of women having babies and not having some type of leave that is paid is quite sickening to me. If you are a mom then you know the amount of work that goes into taking care of that precious gift you bring home from the hospital.

Women need that time to take care of their baby, bond with their baby, and become acclimated to this new role and new member of the family. There are some things that we need to examine in this country and cut \$ putting toward them. This however is not one of them. Let’s be honest, is there anything MORE important than raising a child? Don’t think so...so why do we make it so hard on women?

Jennifer, Glen Ridge, NJ

I did not have paid family leave time when I gave birth to my daughter. She was due on July 9, 2008. I commuted into NYC up until July 4th because I did not want to use any of the precious time I had saved for before she arrived. I had to save all of my vacation time. My company did give 2 weeks paid for maternity leave, but that was not nearly enough time. I had saved enough vacation and coupled with the 2 weeks, I would be

able to be home with my daughter for 6 weeks.

Leaving your child too early can impact you & your family in very negative ways. It took the better part of a year for me to recover from the devastation of having to leaving my baby girl so early on.

Women should have the ability to stay home with their newborns for at least 3 months – paid. The ability for a mother to care for her child is such an essential part of becoming a mother. When that is stripped away from you, it can be incredibly difficult to deal with.

Virginia, Princeton, NJ

I had about 4 months paid maternity leave over the summer of 1988. Although I was in excellent physical condition, the 24 hour a day care, sleep deprivation, plus the pain and weakness caused by the C-section kept me in that weakened condition long after I returned to work.

The paid leave was vital to our health and well-being. I appreciated it fully and remained at my job another 4 years. Going through childbirth with the respect and assistance of an employer was support I needed in every way. I would not have been able to plan having a child without it.

BJ, Basking Ridge, NJ

I had paid leave and job security when our son was born. I went back to work, and kept my career on track. And it was a good thing I did, because when our son was 12 years old, my husband, his father, died of leukemia and I needed that job.

Jane, Wyckoff, NJ

I had paid maternity and do NOT know how I could have made it without it. An added pressure on top of those three months would

have been awful, to me and to the baby, as I would have been an anxious mess. Three months in general is NOT long enough for maternity – this country needs to start adopting a longer maternity leave. Many countries offer upward of 6 months and there is a good reason for it!

Jennifer, Jersey City, NJ

I have an 11-month-old son and only now am I getting my life back on track after the turbulent time I experienced due to a complete lack of paid maternity leave. Looking back to the bright, unseasonably warm March morning my son was born, I can barely believe the optimism my husband and I felt. In fact, in my current stressed, overwrought state I can barely believe I ever felt that optimistic.

Because I worked for a company with fewer than 50 employees, I wasn’t covered under FMLA and wasn’t technically entitled to any leave (paid or not). As it was, my company grudgingly allowed me 6 weeks completely unpaid – 8 in the event I had a c-section (as I did indeed end up doing).

We had about one paycheck’s worth of savings, which quickly evaporated through medical costs, buying baby care basics or supplementing my husband’s income in trying to keep the house going. I had a very stressful 8 weeks.

When I went back to work 8 weeks later, we didn’t even have childcare for the first few weeks, as there was an extremely long wait list, so my sister-in-law charged us to watch my son during the days. I was exhausted, still in pain from my c-section and still attempting to pump whatever milk I could. My supply dried up completely less than a week later.

The combination of working full-time, getting behind on bills while I



was out and then trying to stretch a paycheck to cover those and day-care has had a huge impact on my mental health. I developed what I now know is PPD, which affected my ability to concentrate – something which has led to my being disciplined at work. It's a battle I still face every day. It's only now that we've managed to reign everything in and get it back up-to-date, but I worry about what impact the first year of my son's life – which I spent desperately trying to overcome our financial and emotional burdens – will have on our relationship forever. The system failed me and our family. I can't help but think that if I'd had some more security and a little more time I might be in a much different place right now.

Nancy, Fort Lee, NJ

I have so many friends who become so stressed out with worry after they deliver their babies. They are forced to go back to work much too soon – while they are still recovering from C-Sections, and before real bonding to their babies can occur. What are we doing? Where are our priorities? We should be taking a lesson from Europe on this one. They are putting children first, and we should be doing the same.

Paula, Kearny, NJ

I just had to use paid family leave for my son who had open heart surgery. It is amazing that it was paid although I only received the money when I returned to work. It helped us continue to pay our bills and catch up.

Linda, Merchantville, NJ,

I live in NJ but worked in PA when I had my son. I was told by my employer to apply for FMLA but was told that I would not be paid until I returned to work! I was immediately stressed out thinking



NO JOB PROTECTED LEAVE = TOUGH CHOICES FOR WORKERS

IN JANUARY 2012 THERE WERE

3.7 UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE SEEKING WORK FOR EVERY JOB OPENING

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnover - November 2011 (Department of Labor, 2011)

that we would have to only rely on my husband's salary for 3 months after the birth of my son.

I started to research other country's and learned that in Europe and Australia women get up to one year paid maternity leave!! So disappointing to know that this country does not value family. Needless to say the day I went back to work I cried the whole day because I missed my son and needed income to pay the bills. I am lucky I had a normal birth there are some women who are burdened with large medical bills and have to go back to work sooner.

Jane, Guttenberg, NJ

I was working for a hedge fund where my benefits were just starting to be paid, when I got pregnant. I was asked over and over by the manager of the fund if I intended to continue working once the baby was born. I was an administrator and my daughter was born in January.

My boss called me days after the baby was born to get me back to work. I was lucky that I was able to work from home most days, and that he continued to pay my benefits for some time. But I was actu-

ally told that the baby doesn't do anything but eat and poop the first 3 months so I should have all the time in the world to work. I've since left that position and continue to work freelance, paying for my own health benefits. I am under water financially and continue to look for a full time job with benefits.

Megan, Laurel Springs, NJ

I went on maternity leave when my daughter was born in May 2009. I was going to be out for 6 weeks. After that, my husband was going to take his family leave for the next 6 weeks. Both of our leaves were 'disability paid leaves'. We weren't allowed to even file the paper work while we were still work so when it was time to go to the hospital, I pretty much mailed my paperwork on that day. I didn't receive any compensation until I was into my 2-3 week of motherhood. We hadn't paid any bills for about a month and my parent's had to help us pay our rent so at least we could keep a roof over our heads. When the payments finally came, they were a fraction of my already small paycheck. We paid what little we could but all of our bills fell behind. A lot of our creditors tried to work with us but they

could only do so much. We were struggling to feed ourselves and our baby. I also had to pay out of pocket to keep my health insurance going while I was not at work. I contemplated cutting my leave short to go back to work but we didn't have childcare set up yet. We couldn't afford it anyway.

We struggled for the next 12 weeks until we were both back at work and it took us nearly a year after the baby was born to get caught up. We borrowed tons of money from family and friends. It was a very stressful time for us. New baby and no money. We're thinking long and hard about having another baby any time in the future because we don't want to go through all the drama. It's sad really because we wanted to have two kids.

Jean, Princeton, NJ

Much to most women's dismay, I had the easiest pregnancy in the world. No morning sickness, I felt terrific, I glowed. My husband not only had planned to take his three weeks of maternity leave, but he had worked extra hours the final months of my pregnancy and thus had two additional weeks of comp time...Five weeks for us to be together and figure out who this tiny new person was and how to deal with him.

It's a darn good thing my husband had all that time. The day after I left the hospital all hell broke loose – I sank into post-partum depression, not caring to eat the plates of fruit, crackers, cheese and deli meats my husband made up for me, not caring if that little person died in his sleep (aarrgghh!) Then to add insult to injury, I had severe problems with clogged ducts. I'd have a heating pad on one breast to get things flowing prior to feeding and immediately after nursing, I'd have an ice pack on that breast to close the ducts. If my husband hadn't been there, I

“My boss called me days after the baby was born to get me back to work. I was actually told that the baby doesn't do anything but eat and poop the first 3 months so I should have all the time in the world to work.”

Jane, Guttenberg, NJ

don't know how or if the baby and I would have gotten through those initial weeks! Pregnancy and birth may be the most natural things in the world, but they do not always happen naturally smoothly. Needless to say, my son is an only child!

Becky, Collingswood, NJ

My husband and I were so excited for our son's arrival! He was our first and we couldn't wait to meet him :) I worked right up until my due date, since PA doesn't offer short term disability leave and my company doesn't offer paid maternity leave. My leave was only paid for as long as I had vacation days to burn, leaving the last couple weeks unpaid. The last few weeks of my pregnancy were exhausting; it was tough to get through work battling backaches, swollen ankles and humidity but I wanted to have as much time as possible with my son when he arrived.

Ryan was born 9 days past his due date, leaving only 8 weeks for us to get to know each other be-

fore my little family went its separate ways during the day: I to my job, my husband to his job, and Ryan to daycare. It was very painful. It was like missing a limb to be back at work when my baby was so new, and I wished that I had taken more time off despite the fact that it would have been unpaid. I can't understand why in a country where politicians love to wax poetic about 'family values' our legislation does so little to actually support families.

Paid maternity leave should be the norm, not the exception. Paid paternity leave should be a realistic expectation, not a luxury. Families need those blessed early days together, before the rest of the world presses in, to share the joys of being together, to love, to discover what it is to be a family.

Marya, Tuckahoe, NJ,

My son Joey, four years old at the time, was diagnosed with leukemia in 2001. I was working as a nurse then and don't know how I would have gotten through that experience without family leave, even though it was unpaid. Being able to have those weeks off without fear of losing my job was essential, especially since I was the one in my family who was carrying our health care benefits!

We still needed our family and friends to provide lots of help during that time (mainly with the care of our two other children when I had to spend long days and nights at the hospital), but the FMLA was absolutely a pillar for us, without which we would have felt truly lost.

Jasmine, Randolph, NJ

On July 6, 2002, I gave birth, via emergency c-section to my daughter, whose due date was September 6, 2002, and weighed in at a mere 2lbs 1oz. Given my daughter's birth



weight and the fact that she was born with Down Syndrome (which was diagnosed before birth), along with a partial hole in the heart and respiratory difficulties, she remained at the Hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for almost 8 weeks.

I strongly believe that things would have been a little easier if I had paid family leave since my family, like most American families, depends the income of both parents.

Angela, East Orange, NJ

Paid family leave is vital! I am soon to be a mother of 4 children. I say soon because I am writing this from my hospital bed expecting to deliver our fourth child in the next 2 weeks. After three healthy, normal, deliveries I was shocked to wake up in the middle of the night at 29 weeks when my water broke. Due to that and other complications, I was labeled a high risk pregnancy and immediately admitted to the hospital where I have been on bed rest for 4 weeks.

My husband, the sole earner in our household, has been left with the burden of caring for our 3 young children at home, managing his time & responsibilities at work all while trying to be involved with the doctors & my care in the hospital. We are thankful that New Jersey has passed a paid family leave act that covers spouses during the arrival of a new baby. This was not an option available to us for the previous three children. Between the flexibility of my husband's gracious employer, his paid time off and the payment available for family leave we have calculated that we will still be able to pay our regular bills – but just barely.

Next comes the question of how we will cover the endless medical bills. Our health insurance coverage has been so drastically cut back, due to rising premiums, that we will be left with so much of it

to pay! Family leave is the only way we will have a chance to make it through this with our finances even remotely intact but we are afraid that even that may not be enough!

Virginia, Maplewood, NJ

Research shows how vital quality infant care is. If moms are not given time to care for their babies, our future generations will not be as prepared to lead and care for us. As an aging adult and a teacher, I strongly support paid family leave.

Beverly, Basking Ridge, NJ

Since women bear the burden of producing the next generation of Americans, paid maternity leave should be guaranteed to all.

Cheryl, Lebanon, NJ

Thank God I had paid family leave for the birth of my 2 children. As the primary breadwinner in our home, there is no way we would have been able to survive, let alone be comfortable, during either of my maternity leaves. My husband works hard too, but he does not have the bigger paying job and he cannot stay home and breast feed an infant. It just doesn't work that way. It took strategic planning, but we were able to continue to pay bills without interruption, make the purchases needed to run our home, and nurture both of our children for the most important first few months of life. That NEVER would have been possible if I didn't have those regular paychecks to count on.

Parenting, first time around or third, is hard enough. Add in the stress of not being able to pay bills and no one can relax, bond, or grow healthy together. Again, thank God this was one thing I didn't have to say 'I wish I had...'

Karen, Dumont, NJ

Unfortunately for me the FMLA is useless. I work for a small company under 50 people and it does not apply, which angers me as a working woman who is also currently pregnant. It would be nice if FMLA recognizes that woman/men work for big and small companies and extend their services.

Sarah, West Orange, NJ

When I had my first child I was working full time in my first professional position after completing a masters degree in landscape architecture. My employer was required to provide maternity leave but this was unpaid. The uncertainty that the lack of a continued paycheck introduced to our lives led me quit my job. Somehow I figured, if I wasn't getting paid anyway, at least I could control the terms under which I would return to work. Not having a position to return to made stretching out my maternity leave much easier, but it made returning to work much harder.

It is now eight years later and I have yet to return to full time work in my profession. At first this seemed it was mainly my choice, but that has long since ceased to be the case. I now feel my skills are so far behind current practice that I cannot work in my field.

Having a paid family leave and flexible scheduling would certainly have made it easier to continue working. I would have earned (and be earning) much more money and contributed more in income taxes and social security. Currently my family is able to get by without two full-time wage earners. But we are very concerned about the future.

Anne, South Orange, NJ

When I had my second child I had to quite my job in order to give her (and myself) the time to regain strength after giving birth. The

main reason I quit my wonderful job was to be able to breast feed my daughter for a full year to give her to best start in life I was able to. Now, getting that job (or any comparable one) is VERY difficult. So, my career is now compromised. I wish I had full-time, full pay child birth leave in my state and in the whole country.

NEW MEXICO

Marianne, Las Cruces, NM

My daughter adopted and was able to stay home with the kids when they brought them home. Her sister-in-law gave birth to a preemie and needed to be at the hospital and then stay home with him.

Those things were never possible in my day, before FMLA. Women have become far too valuable to our county and economy to lose their productivity and children are our most important resource.

Eytan, Santa Fe, NM

My wife was able to receive unpaid family leave for both of our children. It was great that she didn't lose her job, but those were tough months financially. Additionally, I did not have time off and missed out on some of those precious first months.

As a result of my experiences, and those of others I know, I feel society suffers when parents choose between work and parenting, especially during the very critical first few weeks and months. Science shows that the longer mothers breastfeed, the healthier the child is. If mothers and fathers can have a little time for their families, and reduced stress, America will be healthier and stronger.

James, Ruidoso/ Mescalero, NM

Personally, I am 55 years old now and past the age of having newborns, however, I'd like to weigh in on the issue of Paid Family Leave. When I had my 6 children, it was still in an age of more 'traditional' values and culture in America, which is to say, a 'nuclear family' of a female mother, and a male husband with the husband being the

"I feel society suffers when parents choose between work and parenting, especially during the very critical first few weeks and months."

Eytan, Santa Fe, NM

primary bread-winner. Since then, about 1977 - 1993, the values and culture have changed fairly dramatically, as you are well aware of.

I've since received a Master's degree in social work and understand the complex dynamics that have required both parents enter the work world to make ends meet now. As such, I went out into the workforce and became the primary bread-winner and my wife stayed at home and reared our children; that era has ended. Today's families need the Paid Family Leave Act to be implemented immediately in order to stay in-step with changed times. This will, in the long term, as-

sist not only the families of America but you as law makers to alleviate one of the many your faced with.

Cornelia, Aztec, NM

When I had my first child, I went through a perfect LaMaze birth until she had left my body. At that point the placenta wouldn't separate from my uterus, the docs had to fully anesthetize me and scrape it out. Bottom line was that I contracted a uterine infection, had to have a blood transfusion and was very much not healthy.

No maternity leave was available to me at the job I had, which was as an on-air news anchor. KSL, my employer, assumed all news people would be male and thus did not offer such coverage to its female news personnel. Pretty ironic, since the station was owned by the 'family friendly' Mormon Church. But then, the church assumed women didn't work. I was allowed to use my annual vacation of two weeks, plus my one week of sick leave. I came back to work after that time, but did not fully regain my health for about eight months. It was absolute and complete hell. Don't make other women have to go through an experience such as mine.

Veronica, Las Cruces, NM

While I do have FMLA coverage, I do not have paid leave. I had managed to cover, with an accumulation of sick and annual leave around 9 weeks of my 12 week leave. When the leave hours ran out, so did my paycheck. We were forced to cash out our IRA and use it to cover bills, food, medical insurance, diapers and the like.

When I returned to work, I had no sick leave or annual leave left to cover me and my child in case of emergency or illness. I have



yet to be able to accumulate any significant amount of time since then either. Children get sick and schools have days off...so, moms and dads can't afford to miss work when they are ill or just need a bit of downtime. It seems to me that America can do better.

NEW YORK

Katinka, New York, NY

I saved up my sick days for 5 years in order to accumulate one month of paid time off for when my husband and I ever had a baby. It was a constant source of stress for us because we desperately wanted a child but couldn't comprehend how we would take care of him/her if we both had to work. How does one take good care of a newborn if one can't BE WITH the newborn? Not to mention the fact that working mothers can not breast feed well if at all.

As a an early childhood specialist with the NYC department of Education, I know very well that the foundation of a well-balanced, social emotional well being of children starts at home with their parents. There is no point in discussing bettering our education system unless we first establish a foundation for our children at home as babies! My family is in Sweden and Finland and so comparing their 18 months paid parental leave with us who have NO FEDERAL parental leave, is very difficult to fathom.

I am lucky enough to be in the teachers union which therefore 'allowed' me to take an unpaid (with no health benefits), leave. We are barely able to sustain ourselves right now on my husband's salary and I am going back to work in June. However, our calculations have shown that when I do go back, my entire salary will go towards child care. I am purely re-



HAVING A BABY IS A LEADING CAUSE OF POVERTY SPELLS FOR WOMEN IN THE U.S.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
Indicators of Welfare Dependence. Washington, DC:
DHHS, 1998.

turning to work to reinstate our health insurance. We are paying for COBRA which is shockingly expensive. We are paying \$1,100.00 per month on one person's salary. How does this make any sense? Yes, I will be forced to go back to work which means that I will be paying for someone else to raise my child.

I thought this nation was so concerned with 'Family values'? Really? Which and whose family? Certainly not mine! I am sickened by the choices and sacrifices we had to make to have our wonderful son. Having and raising children in developmentally appropriate, caring ways should be a first priority for this nation. How can we get to point C and D if we haven't even made points A and B a priority?

Selina, New York, NY

A friend gave birth two weeks ago. She was diagnosed with hypertension, as was her new baby. neither was allowed to leave the hospital, and having paid family leave allowed the mother to recover and provide for her child without worrying that her job would be gone when she was ready to return to work.

Mary, Malta, NY

After the birth of my 2nd child in July 2010, I received just over \$100/wk for 8 weeks and utilized what little vacation/sick time I have – and still had at least 2 weeks of unpaid time towards the end of my FMLA. I would do anything to spend that time with my baby, but it was INCREDIBLY difficult financially... and I was forced to go back to work full time at the end of my 12 weeks maternity leave. It's so disappointing the hoops that people have to go through to spend quality family time in this country.

Christina, Mechanicville, NY

After the birth of my son, I had 6 weeks of disability pay and NO other paid benefits with which to pay my bills. I worried every day that the financial strain would be too much for our young family and actually begged my boss if to allow me to come back earlier than I had originally planned. This was definitely not an ideal situation, and likely contributed to my postpartum depression.

I was fortunate enough to have a full time job with benefits before the birth of my daughter, however, so I was able to focus on my baby rather than finances. Not surprisingly, I had a much less stressful (and longer) maternity leave – which made it easier to establish breastfeeding and a pumping regime before returning to work full time.

Clemens, New York, NY

As a family therapist and psychiatrist I have large experience with the rhythms of family life, and I know no useful work can be done either in therapy or in the office when the hormonal and emotional crisis of birth is combined with sleeplessness and disorganization at such times. Requiring work from either partner within a month after

the arrival of a new baby is either a foolish expectation that flies in the face of experience, or an encouragement of gender inequality, with men getting sleep because 'they have to work' – or both.

Melissa, New York, NY

Having no paid maternity leave from my waitressing job threw my husband and I into financial chaos. It was so stressful – on top of having a newborn, not even knowing how we were going to make what little savings we had last, having to stress about buying diapers and basic survival items. We had tried to save as much as we could before I stopped working but what should have been a very joyful time with a learning curve of new parenthood, was a very desperate time financially.

Marta, Jackson Heights, NY

At the time that I had my daughter I was working in a position in which I was able to get unpaid 12 weeks of FMLA. Although I had to take out a loan just to get by, I was fortunate to be able to stay with her for that amount of time. It allowed both me to get adjusted to having a baby in the family, and to look for adequate child care options when I was going to go back to work and school. It also allowed me to establish nursing and my daughter was able to breastfeed exclusively for the next few months until it was time to introduce solid foods and then for the next two years.

We were able to establish routines in our lives and because she was breastfeed, the only visits to the doctor were the ones for checkups and immunizations. Those doctor visits I was able to do on the weekends, so I had very few sick and vacation days lost. Having a paid family leave, even if for just those 12 weeks would have helped a lot, because I would not have to go into debt just because I had a baby. There

“Having no paid maternity leave from my waitressing job threw my husband and I into financial chaos.”

Melissa, New York, NY

are a lot of expenses when it comes to raising our children and the first few months are critical and having a financial support during that time is extremely important.

Susan, West Seneca, NY

Back in March of 2010, my Mom was diagnosed with Stage 4 Lung Cancer and although we had the much needed assistance of Hospice, much of the burden was left to the family to take care of her and make her as comfortable as possible. My sister Kelly, who had obtained FMLA for this very reason, is more or less our hero. She used her FMLA so she could go to Mom's treatment with her at Roswell Park Cancer Institute and to be able to spend as much time with Mom as she possibly could.

Mom lost her battle with Lung Cancer on October 25th, 2011 and were it not for FMLA, I don't think Kelly would have been home enough to spend time with her. We thank our lucky stars for FMLA, please don't take it away. we may need it someday for our widowed father.

Joanna , Brooklyn, NY

Because I knew that receiving paid leave from my job was highly unlikely, I quit my professional job

when my husband and I started trying to conceive. I was certain that I wanted to stay home with my baby for an extended period, and in order to guarantee this, I quit my job and our family suffered the economic consequences. If I had thought that paid leave was an option, I may very well have stayed on at my job until my child was born, thereby benefiting both my family and my employer.

Isadora, Kew Gardens, NY

Being a first-time mom, I could not face going back to work full time. I worried about who would care for my baby, would they do a good job, would they put my baby face up, not shake my baby, give her only what I say? I went back to work because I had to. I needed to pay my bills and have a home. My husband's income was not enough to stay home full time, not even part time but I did...for one month I went back 4 days a week, then resigned getting a job much closer to home.

Becoming a mom is the most powerful, and valuable thing anyone can offer the world. Why doesn't it get the respect it deserves? Let's make it happen.

Jennifer, Cheektowaga, NY

Both parents should be able to have access to paid leave when a baby comes into the picture. Both of my children are grown and I didn't have that luxury. I also had an abusive husband on top of dealing the a new baby.

Heather, Jackson Heights, NY

Five months into my first pregnancy, I had to have a cyst removed from my ovary. It was invasive, abdominal surgery which took me the rest of my pregnancy to recover



from. After my birth, I had three months paid leave and my husband had two weeks. As a result, my husband was able to be there to bond with our son and give me time to rest and recover from the surgery and subsequent birth.

I was also able to exclusively breast feed our son until he was six months old, which has proven health benefits. This would not have been possible if I had to return to work earlier. This time allowed us to adjust to being new parents, and allowed me to better take care of myself before the hectic stress of being a full-time working mom began.

Astrid, Bronx, NY

For each of my three children, I took an unpaid maternity leave, a total of three years, as I wanted to breast feed my babies for their first year. I got job security, that's all. Of course this has had an adverse effect on my retirement benefits. In contrast, my women cousins in Norway get 80% of their salary for the whole first year after delivery if they choose to stay home with their baby. Their husbands also get a month's paid paternity leave. which country really values its children?

Rebecca, Rosendale, NY

For financial reasons, I could only afford to take maternity leaves for 4 and 6 months, respectively. Although my job was fortunately protected, my lack of income made life a hardship. My husband's income was not enough to support our household and keep all the bills paid. So, while staying home with a new baby was joyful, it was also marred with a constant anxiety about paying the rent on time and all the other bills. Then I had the additional fear of finding and affording good-quality child care. This was a serious problem after

“The knowledge that I will have 12 weeks to focus on meeting the first needs of my child enables me to focus on my job now, before I deliver the baby.”

Erin, Bronx, NY

my first child was born and I had to return to work.

Although child care providers offer an important service, they are paid very poorly; yet low and middle income earners struggle to pay their child care bills which can seem astronomical. So, after baby #2 came along and my maternity leave was ending, we realized that it would cost more to pay for two small children in day care than my husband was currently earning. So he quit and stayed home for 3 years, which was good for the kids but very hard on our finances. What a relief when the kids were old enough for school. How sad that we couldn't enjoy our children's early childhood more due to constant financial and child care concerns.

Alisa, Brooklyn, NY

I adopted my children internationally, and was not entitled to paid 'maternity leave.' I needed to use my vacation time and then add UNPAID family leave. We were in their country for 2 weeks, and then home. When we returned, we were faced with a child that was severely sick, with a diagnosis of 'failure to thrive.'

Being jet lagged, sleep deprived, having to deal with a child that had been housed in a orphanage for the first year of her life, we had a multitude of issues to contend with. The medical appointments were numerous, the surgeries were many and we were still dealing with attachment issues. It would have been nice to have considered this under the same conditions and opportunities and any new child entering into a family. Paid family leave would have allowed for a less stressful adjustment, without the prejudice of having the government not recognize 'an adopted baby' as having the same needs as a child born out of ones own uterus. Family is family, however that comes to be. The law should be universal.

Erica, Brooklyn, NY

I am 2 months away from having my second child. I used a lot of my own days (that I've banked over the years) to stay with my daughter when I had her. Now I do not have enough days saved in my bank to stay home very long with the next baby. I must decide between staying home with my newborn baby and establishing a good breastfeeding routine with him or returning to work after a c-section in order to obtain a paycheck. By the way, I work as an educator, caring for and nurturing other people's children all day.

Ali, New York, NY

I am a freelance worker and so I really get no benefit that I can see from the Paid Family Leave Act. But that doesn't stop me from seeing the overwhelming importance of it. Especially because I know how challenging and difficult it is to live without any sort of financial support in the face of motherhood.

I wish there were more done on a federal level for parents who

don't have employer benefits. That would go a long way towards emphasizing the importance of motherhood in our society. But living without benefits lets me know exactly how wonderful a thing this act is! It is a crucial start towards all dedicated parents being treated with support and respect.

Christina, New York, NY

I am a permanent resident in the US, originally from Germany. My home country provides up 14 months paid leave for both parents and up to 3 years of paid and unpaid leave without losing your current position. When I was pregnant with my now 6 month old son and I had to find out about the shocking maternity policy of my company, I was really embarrassed to tell my family and friends in Germany that I would have to go back to work after only 12 weeks of which only 4 weeks were covered by my employer.

I was so torn between the decision to return to work or stay at home and be 'UNEMPLOYED'!! My personal opinion is that it is very very sad how little the US government supports families. And instead of tax benefits and reductions or even child support from the government (as you get 185 Euros in Germany every month) I just found out that I even owe tax money even though I lost 2 months of my earnings & the time with my wonderful son!

Robin, Bronx, NY

I am currently an assistant professor at a university in New York. There's no standard put in place for leave. Knowing this and knowing that it would put my department under strain for me to take time off to have a baby, I did what some consider crazy: I planned to have a baby around the school calendar. When it came time to plan to start a family, I thought about my due date more

than anything else. Lucky for me, I didn't have any trouble conceiving, and I had the due date I dreamed of: April 28th – leaving only 3 class days left of the semester.

For those remaining days in the semester, I was lucky to have three supportive female colleagues who covered each of my three courses in those three sessions. Because I get paid on a 12 month cycle, I knew that my summer 'maternity leave' would be covered. However, I don't know what would have happened if I wasn't so lucky. My family needs my paycheck – with the cost of living so high in NY, not getting a paycheck is not an option.

I also was lucky in that I didn't have to risk any resentment that might come from my job for having to take time off to have a baby. It worked out for me – I was lucky.. but I know many other women out there who are not as lucky..and it's time for things to change.

Erin, Bronx, NY

I am expecting my first child this year. If I did not have paid leave, I would have to quit my job. The knowledge that I will have 12 weeks to focus on meeting the first needs of my child enables me to focus on my job now, before I deliver the baby. It also means I can make a promise to my employer, my colleagues, and my clients, that I will return 12 weeks after the baby is born. If I didn't have the security of knowing that my job would be there for me, and my bills could be paid while I am caring for my child, I wouldn't be able to guarantee that I can pick up where I leave off on the projects I'm about to put on hold.

Paula, Ithaca, NY

I am lucky – as a teacher, I was able to save up my sick leave over the course of several years in anticipation of my maternity leave, so I

was able to stay home with my son for the first 13 weeks of his life. I do not know how I would have been able to manage otherwise, as he did not sleep more than an hour straight, had GERD and hip dysplasia requiring a brace worn 23 hours per day.

I did need a doctor's note to use my paid sick time. My husband had to take a week's vacation. It was very challenging. I believe it is wrong to separate a mother from her newborn and force her to undergo financial hardship in order to nurture her infant. Why can't the USA join the rest of the world and give mothers paid leave? That would be a true expression of family values.

Felipa, Kingston, NY

I am signing this after spending the day with my six week old daughter, who cried all day because she forgot how to nurse after being given a bottle to get her ready for my return to work next week. I am heartbroken at having to return when she is this young. Six weeks is not enough time to securely establish breastfeeding. Our laws need to change in order to enable families to provide the best care for their children and for nursing mothers. Our children are our future.

Pam, Geneva, NY

I am the insurance carrier for our family, so when I took maternity leave I had to have enough cash saved to cover my portion of health insurance. The company I worked for let me pay in cash or took my contributions out of my paychecks following my leave until the balance was paid in full. I was able to collect four- to six weeks disability and then I was on my own. Because disability checks are around one half



your earnings, I was really taking six weeks of unpaid leave as opposed to four and paying for my health insurance as well. Then after my first child it was necessary to keep paying daycare expenses, as I would lose my 'spot' in daycare. Yes, 'poverty spell' is an apt description.

Zoey, Brooklyn, NY

I did not have a job when my babies were born, partly because I couldn't figure out how to keep a job doing all the craziness that was involved in having babies. We MUST make it easier for women to have children and be employed. We are losing some of our best people for extended periods of time due to the inability to work and deal with newborns at the same time. On the other end are the people who MUST work and therefore, risk short-changing their children. A whole country of short-changed children is not going to keep us in the lifestyle to which we have become accustomed.

Kathryn, Brooklyn, NY

I didn't have paid family leave, so I meticulously planned my savings over the course of my pregnancy. How much did I need to save so that I could take off 3 months? 6 months? I thought I had it all in the bag. I was careful on the grocery bill, and avoided added expenses, like 'entertaining' myself with a movie, or a date night. I worked extra jobs in the last few months of my pregnancy to make sure I had enough.

And then the unthinkable happened. My husband got injured on the job. He would be out for a total of almost 6 months, pretty much identical to my planned maternity leave. He was covered by workers compensation insurance, so we didn't lose all his income, but it wasn't what we had expected. We knew that our maternity leave re-



WOMEN WHO TAKE PAID LEAVE ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE WORKING 9-12 MONTHS AFTER A CHILD'S BIRTH COMPARED WITH WOMEN WHO TOOK NO LEAVE

Linda Houser, PhD "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public," A Report for the Center for Women and Work, January 2012

services would be exhausted sooner than expected. I had to take on part-time work to make ends meet. We ended up taking on debt.

Alina, New York, NY

I feel very fortunate that I had paid family leave. I could breast-feed and bond with the baby through this time of little sleep. I was laid off two years later, so I feel very lucky that I had my baby while I was employed.

Irene, Wantagh, NY

I grew up in NY, but moved (back) to Canada 10 years ago. Through Facebook, I've read how my friends in the US have had to go back to work at 4 or 6 weeks. Some were able to string together all their vacation and sick days and squeak out 8-12 weeks. We were all sharing stories of how the first couple of weeks were (if we could actually type anything coherent) and fairly quickly they all were talking about finding child care, going back to work... I am so grateful I was able to stay with my son for a full year – while collecting employment insurance – and I am lucky that my employer topped up my salary to 93% of my usual wage.

Even without a top up, being able to spend the whole first year with my son was amazing... I didn't have to worry about whether I'd have a job when I went back...I wish all parents are given the op-

portunity to enjoy watching their baby grow in the first couple of months – without having to worry about job security.

Ines, New York, NY

I had my mother very sick, she was admitted to same hospital where I was working and had a very hard time to take days off or even going to see her for a few minutes. The excuse was that I was not sick and was not suppose to take time off after spending the entire night with her at the Emergency.FMLA is one of greatest accomplishments of our unions.

Isabel, New York, NY

I have two kids. It's simply impossible to work immediately after giving birth. You're so tired that you can't think straight anyway – I hardly remember anything from those times. I am lucky enough to manage my own schedule, being self-employed, but what I am writing about is my husband's being home to help and how essential it was for our family to have him there.

I had two c-sections and couldn't lift the baby or even, at first, get out of bed. Especially once we had a toddler and had another baby arrive, having him home was essential. It's hard to describe it unless you've been through it – but imagine being tortured and only allowed to sleep a few hours here

and there for a week, and then being asked to do anything at all. Now it is easier if you don't breastfeed, although you still have to share bottle duty with someone. But breastfeeding is really important to a child's and a mother's lasting health. So making people choose between their job or breastfeeding is a really bad idea.

Stacey, Bronx, NY

I recently adopted a 23 month old daughter from an orphanage. She has dramatic delays due to the care she received in the orphanage. I am taking three months leave to help bonding, adjustment and to get her the services necessary for her to flourish. This is an unpaid leave. I wish I could have financial security while I, a single mother, am expanding my family and giving an abandoned child a chance to have a promising future.

S, Flushing, NY

I returned to work recently when my daughter was 8 weeks old. While I work for a large hospital and therefore had my leave guaranteed, I did not have pay guaranteed. I returned to work before I felt fully recovered, as financially I had few other options. I spent much of my maternity leave trying to figure out how to juggle the bills, and continue to try to figure out how I will manage my expenses despite a significant reduction of income this year. I wish I would have the opportunity to focus on parenting and its accompanying opportunities without having to work on the challenges that arise financially.

Celene, Brooklyn, NY

I teach in a college and my daughter was born in June over summer break. I was lucky. I was able to spend the summer at home with my daughter and my husband. Late in my pregnancy – the spring before

my daughter was born- I found out that my husband had advanced cancer. I took care of my daughter and my husband over that summer. He died a year later. I don't know what I would have done during that summer if I didn't have the comfort of having that summer leave and a job waiting for me.

Melissa, Hopewell Junction, NY

I was able to take 6 weeks paid. Then I took 6 more weeks unpaid. It wasn't even until 8 weeks that I started to feel like myself and the 'haze' started to lift. In addition, I know so many mothers who stop breastfeeding in order to prepare to return to work. (I was very lucky that I had a place to pump and I made it work.) Giving moms more time at home often leads to longer breastfeeding which can lead to healthier kids...and cost savings to our country that is far greater than the few weeks paid to the mother.

Adriana, Brooklyn, NY

I was fortunate to have paid maternity leave. After 5 years at my company I was entitled to about six weeks' paid 'sick leave' at about 60% of my salary. Not much, but better than nothing.

After a perfectly safe, healthy hospital delivery I was still amazed at how sore I was and how much time the recovery took. I needed all 12 of those weeks. But I also needed all 12 of those weeks to bond with my new son. I returned to work full-time and will always be grateful with the time I spent making sure my son felt loved and secure from the very start. There is no replacement for that, and you definitely need more time, not less.

Janis, Pittsford, NY

I was fortunate to work for an understanding employer who 'allowed' me to extend my six-week

paid maternity leave to 12 weeks by my ability to cobble together accumulated sick and vacation days. The negotiation process was still very stressful. I was the first of my company to have a baby. It still would have been nice to have the right to paid maternity leave, without needing to negotiate or lose sleep over the worry of it. It also would be reassuring to know that all American women could have the same opportunity as I.

Maryann, New York, NY

I was given disability while on maternity, a fraction of my salary. Yet I was among the more fortunate of pregnant working women. My husband took unpaid leave to help me at home. We struggled immensely to pay the bills and cover mounting expenses. Why do American work places function as though there is a full-time caretaker at home? Please make the U.S. the family-friendly nation we have the potential to be. Expenses skyrocket when a baby is born, and that is not the time to take pay from parents.

Emily, New York, NY

I was lucky enough to have 3 months of paid maternity leave when I had my first baby. I have since learned that that was actually quite rare for our country. After 3 months I realized I was not at all ready to go back to work, so I quit. I wish I had been given the option to have simply taken a longer maternity leave. Having a new baby, especially if it is your first, is such a haze of sleep-deprivation, life changes, hormones and the like, all of which makes it very hard to make important decisions as to whether or not a person wants to truly stop working, or just not work during that important time in our life.



When our babies are so young, we naturally want to be with them all the time. That doesn't mean that we won't eventually want to resume our careers. Women should be given this option by having LONGER MATERNITY LEAVES. How can we talk about family values when we force women to make decisions that sometimes go directly against what is good for a family – to have the mother stay home for the first year of a child's life?!

Beth, Rochester, NY

I was lucky to be a teacher and have an unpaid summer 'off', but I was forced to return after 2 months because my employer would not let me use paid sick time in the fall, only unpaid FMLA. I was no longer considered 'disabled' after 6 weeks. I left my two-month old at home so I could pay my bills. I would have taken another month off if I had been able to use the sick time that I had banked.

Dawn, New York, NY

I was lucky to have 4.5 months @ home but nice I went back to work I had to cut back on breast feeding. It was a hard adjustment. We were lucky to have someone live with us 6 days a week to take care of my son but I would have preferred to stay home and be the care taker for my son.

Rebecca, Brooklyn, NY

I was semi-lucky as I got 2 months of paid leave, which basically paid for my health insurance while I was out. Losing that extra month of pay, though, meant we were completely broke by the time we needed to start paying for child-care. The fact that I was on top of pumping while I was still nursing allowed us to not have to buy formula, and our son almost never gets sick. My employer was very generous with me and allowed me

to keep my vacation time, which I used to see family and introduce the baby. I can't imagine not having had that two weeks for that.

Celeste, Brooklyn, NY

I was very fortunate to have paid maternity leave when my son was born in 1989. It made it possible for me to be present for his milestones and to keep a close watch on his health. At 2 months old he came down with pneumonia and needed 11 doctor visits during that illness. If I'd been forced to take off work every time he had to see the doctor I probably would have lost my job.

“When our babies are so young, we naturally want to be with them all of the time. That doesn't mean we won't eventually want to resume our careers.”

Emily, New York, NY

Meredith, Fairport, NY

I work for a company with more than 50 employees. My husband does not. Therefore, he is not eligible for FMLA. When a child is born, if his or her parents do not work for a company with 50+ employees, does this mean that the child needs less parental care during those first few months of life? When our daughter was born, I was able to take 10 weeks of paid FMLA and two weeks of vacation time.

This helped me establish a breastfeeding routine, but due to the exhaustion that comes with caring for a young infant, I suffered from walking pneumonia the first three months after returning to work. In addition, our daughter contracted several respiratory illnesses at day care during this time and experienced breathing problems which required a nebulizer to help alleviate. Therefore, I believe six months of paid family leave would have made a huge difference in my family's health and well being.

Heather, Astoria, NY

I work for the city of New York. I am entitled only to the paid time off that I can save. For my second child, this amounted to ONE week. Much of my time off accrued went to caring for my older child and my own maternal health appointments. The rest of my 12 weeks off was covered by FMLA and a cash advance on our credit card.

My husband is a PhD student and I earn the majority of our household income. Now 80% of our income goes to rent and day care. Then we have regular bills and food to buy. It is going to be a very long time before we can dig ourselves out of this debt. I know it was a choice to stay home for 12 weeks. But doesn't my baby deserve the time to bond with me? I couldn't leave her care to someone else at such a tender young age (3 months is bad enough). This time in her life only comes once. Our hope is that someday we'll be debt free and only remember the wonderful early moments of our child's life.

Meghan, Brooklyn, NY,

I worked full time as a personal/executive assistant to the president of a textile company in New York City until two weeks before my due date. My company allowed maximum of 3 months maternity leave

with out pay. I was the breadwinner in my family. Although I had 3 months off, I was still responsible for paying my half of our health insurance, which sky rocketed with our new addition.

My three months of maternity leave was sprinkled with a large dose of stress on how to make ends meet. I had read about laws in other countries for new mothers and was shocked to find that many countries even help new mothers financially for the first six months! I thought I was living in a progressive society, boy was I wrong. Making ends meet in NYC is not an easy thing to do. Making ends meet without pay for three months, a new born baby and gigantic insurance payments is really freaking hard!

Jennifer, Brooklyn, NY

I'm a mother of 3 I have never had family leave. With my first baby I returned to work when she was 5 weeks old my job gave me my saved up sick and vacation days wich added up to a weeks pay it didn't last long and we then needed to rely on my husbands income to support us all.

With baby number 2 I had been let go from my full time position which would have given me family leave but they offered me a part time position which didn't I took it so I could continue to help monetarily but again I needed to go back pretty quickly because with that position (which I still hold) there was no leave. The same was true with my 3rd child though child care got more complicated so I'm still not back as I'd like and I can't really afford but I can't afford the child care either.

Nancy, Coram, NY

In Feb. 2009, I got laid off from my job 3 months into my first pregnancy. I job hunted for a few months, but gave up looking until

Oct. In the meantime, I was collecting unemployment. It did not make sense to start a new job, only to have to go on maternity leave a few months later. Also I would not have been covered under the FMLA after the baby was born. I was actually better off staying on unemployment because I would not have had any right to maternity leave whatsoever, much less paid maternity leave. What is wrong with this picture?

Lillian, White Plains, NY

It has been many years since I was on unpaid maternity leave but I do remember it very clearly. I worked for a non profit social service agency helping families deal with their issues among them drug abuse. I was working to help couples strengthen their coping skills so they wouldn't lose their children or be able to regain them. The irony was in my agency like many other non profit social service agencies there was no paid maternity leave. It was a matter of sick days, vacation days and short term disability.

The financial stress and pressure is enormous to return to work as quickly as possible so that you have a salary again and don't lose your position. We were lucky that we had the support of family but after 8 weeks I had to return to work and be away from my baby for long days. It is important that there is paid family leave so that the family can bond with their child and be there in the earliest months of development.

Leslie, Purchase, NY

Maternity leave is a critical time to bond with your baby, provide needed care, and establish a breastfeeding routine. I was lucky – I was able to patch together sick leave, short-term disability leave, and vacation to spend 2 1/2 months with my son. Of course, this was a frac-

tion of what my colleagues working for the same company in other places – Brisbane, Brussels, London, Nairobi – get, but still I was grateful. I have many friends in the US, who lost their position at a company, sometime even lost their jobs, after having or adopting a child.

Nancy, Lancaster, NY

My first (and only) child was born in 2000. It was necessary for her to be delivered via c-section so my recovery took longer. I decided to nurse because her Dad was type I diabetic and the longer I could nurse the better her chances of not developing that dreadful, unforgiving disease. I had challenges producing enough milk so I had to either nurse or pump EVERY 2 HOURS! I was exhausted and barely slept for months.

My husband ended up taking 2 weeks of his paid vacation to help take care of our daughter. I took 4 weeks unpaid family leave. This was a hardship because I had the higher salary. Women need more than 4-6 weeks paid leave to care for their newborns. Imagine the change your body goes through physically and mentally after giving birth!

Maryann, New York, NY,

My husband and I are blessed to live near both sides of our families. When my son arrived, we were inundated with grandparents, aunts, and uncles who wanted to help. As well, I was granted 12 weeks of maternity leave by my employer (a nonprofit women's rights organization). I was grateful to have that time with my child, which allowed me to devote time to breastfeeding successfully, caring for him, reading to him, and exposing him to the wonders of our city. However, I was most certainly in a minority.



Most of my friends and colleagues came to the city for work, and left behind family. When it came time for their children to be born, most of them feared losing their jobs while on leave (often much less than 12 weeks) and were riddled with anxiety when they should have been enjoying their newest addition, and had to rely on costly childcare when they went back to work, as well as whenever their children were sick. The political rhetoric these days appears to be very pro-family, but the laws state otherwise. Paid leave should be available to everyone who cares for children, the sick, and the elderly.

Jennifer, Jay, NY

My husband and I were very lucky – he used vacation time and personal time to take a month off after our son was born in 2008, and it was a good thing he did, since I wound up needing an emergency c-section and had a much longer recovery time than we anticipated. As for my job, I had resigned from my ‘traditional’ job as the executive director of a local historical society and was working from home as a freelance community development and grant writing consultant, so I was able to continue working from home.

I’m incredibly lucky now because I have since rejoined the work force through a telecommuting job I have as a freelance writer for a major website. I don’t know what we would do if I didn’t have the flexibility I do with my job. I have a hard time understanding why the American workplace is so hostile to new families with their policies about paid leave time – we do want and need a new generation of well-adjusted, well educated American workers, don’t we? So why do we penalize workers who decide to have children by not offering any kind of paid leave time for fathers? Maternity leave in the U.S. is pretty much a joke, and we

need to wake up to the importance of allowing parents to bond with their children if we want to have a happy, productive society in the future.

“I went back to work stronger and more able to handle the bumps of life as a result of the leave.”

Rena, New York, NY

Alice, Brooklyn, NY

My mom went back to work 6 weeks after having a baby in 1977, to keep her job. I assumed the world would have progressed since then. When I was pregnant, imagine my horror when I found out that my company was not required to give me ONE DAY of maternity leave, paid OR unpaid! We have fewer than 50 employees – as does the employer of almost every single one of my friends – so FMLA does not apply to us. I fought tooth and nail to get some paid leave from my company.

Because we live in the U.S., the company felt it was being ‘generous’ by giving me 6 weeks paid leave, considering that FMLA did not require them to give me any leave at all. I took 10 weeks leave total, which sounded reasonable BEFORE I had a baby. It was incredibly hard work – more than I was prepared for – and I barely felt ready to go back to work when I did – even though I was lucky enough to have 10 weeks off. We had heartbreaking breastfeeding problems, largely because I re-

turned to work when I did. Even two weeks more would have made a big difference for us.

As it was, since I’m the primary breadwinner in my family, those two lost paychecks cleaned out half our savings! And I’ve seen the rest dwindle over the 5 months my baby has been in this world. I wouldn’t trade the experience of having a baby for anything, of course.

My baby is the light of my life. But I wish I lived in a country that didn’t just preach about ‘family values’ and how great it is to be a ‘grizzly mama’ but actually supported the decision to have a baby in the ways that matter most – like guaranteeing paid family leave. This outdated, retro reality has GOT to change. I am looking at my little daughter and hoping that if she decides to have kids, it will be in an America that is so much more supportive of that decision than it is now, or than it was when my mom had me.

Rena, New York, NY

My mother was dying of cancer, I was raising my baby alone and my job demanded constant travel. A leave of absence allowed me to keep my job during a break where I could care for my mother, my baby (and myself a little bit). I went back to work stronger and more able to handle the bumps of life as a result of the leave.

Jennifer, Cheektowaga, NY

My sister took care of my mom who had alzheimers disease. After our mom died she moved in with our dad to was legally blind. She didn’t get paid for these caretaking duties which she would have gotten paid for if either of my parents would have been put into a nursing home. She saved this country a lot of money doing this without any payment.

Astrid, Bronx, NY

My university gives a woman on maternity leave her full salary for one semester now, but there was no such arrangement during any of the three years I was out with a new baby. Trying to feed the family took a lot of creativity; we became vegetarian by necessity. But I still managed to breast feed each baby for its first year. I think it would be much harder to do this today.

Lauren, New York, NY

My work does not offer paid maternity/paternity leave, so I had to use a combination of my paid time off and short-term disability. Unfortunately, I was extremely ill during my first trimester and was not able to work for four weeks, so by the time I had my baby girl I only was able to get short-term disability for two weeks.

Luckily, we had saved enough money so that I could take 14 weeks off from the time my daughter was born. It was important to me to spend as much time with her as possible to make sure that breastfeeding was off to a good start. That was especially important to me since I had had breast surgery 14 years ago and had a low-milk supply and needed to pump several times a day and use an at-breast supplemental feeding device.

But I wanted to give my daughter all the breastmilk I could, since there are so many benefits to breastmilk and breastfeeding. Now my daughter is seven months old and a very happy baby. I'm lucky to have a family member take care of her while my husband and I work. I enjoy my work but wish I had more time to spend with my daughter.

kathleen, New York, NY

No sick days, no pay. We just earned less money. Time for the United States to provide this very minimal help to working parents.

80 PERCENT OF MOMS

WITH ACCESS TO EITHER PAID OR UNPAID MATERNITY LEAVE RETURN TO THEIR SAME JOB POSTPARTUM



The Effects of Paid Family and Medical Leave on Employment Stability and Economic Security. Heather Boushey and Sarah Jane Glynn, April 2012

All parents should have the ability to care well for the next generation. It is in society's best interests.

Galit, New York, NY

Not having a paid maternity leave meant that for my first baby it took us nearly 6 months after I went back to work to financially recover from the unpaid leave I had to take (I only had 6 weeks of 50% paid leave and had to supplement it with unpaid leave).

I am now pregnant again and saving every penny because, again, I will have to take leave without pay, only this time I am also paying child care costs. Women should have more protection to take the time needed after their child is born. Even FMLA is only 12 wks long and for some moms that is not enough.

Elizabeth, White Plains, NY

Now with both parents in most families being forced to work in order to make ends meet, it is important that the employer sector should modify its stance and allow more generous maternity/paternity leave. If there are two parents, one should be allowed plenty of time to take care of the new baby. In single-

parent families, the parent should be encouraged to take care of his or her baby by having paid leave as long as possible. If my daughter's husband had not been interested and concerned about their babies, her career would have suffered.

Betsy, Brooklyn, NY

Officially, our work policy was: one month of paid leave, second month at half pay, and the third month at no pay. But my supervisor was extremely helpful when we were planning my maternity leave and we were able to cobble together together sick days, vacation days, and comp days I had saved up. That, in combination with disability checks from the State of California (where I gave birth), I was able to have three months of paid leave, which I am so thankful for.

My son had to be delivered early, and he needed a LOT of extra care in the first three months of life. He needed to be swaddled tightly, held close to me, and breastfed constantly to keep him happy and satiated. I was able to establish a healthy start for my son, and the relationship that we built during those important weeks were irreplaceable. After I returned to work, I was able to pump at my workplace, which enabled us to feed my son almost exclusively breastmilk for the first year of his life. The evidence is widespread that this is the best way to stave off later illnesses for children, including obesity and diabetes.

At the three-month mark, I almost immediately saw a change in my son, and he was able to be more independent, less fussy, and better handled by my husband and other family members besides myself. My doula called the first 12 weeks of an infant's life, 'the fourth trimester,' and in my experience, it truly was that. I was ready to go back



to work, but at any time before my 12 week mark, I was not ready at all. Please advocate for paid family leave for all families in the United States.

Jennie, Sodus, NY

Paid leave is so important because the care of our tiny babies is so important! Luckily my husband had a good enough job when we had our children that I was able to stay home and breastfeed my children. To this day they are healthier than most of the children I know!

Dr. Emily, Livonia, NY

Since the birth of my son, I have not been able to earn enough money to keep us financially stable. The only way we have survived is by the kindness of my mother, who has welcomed us into her house to live with her. When we speak about the feminization of poverty, this is where it starts, at birth.

As soon as I had a child, my earning capacity, scheduling, childcare and expenses all sky rocketed. As a single mother who receives absolutely no child support, this is particularly difficult, and without the assistance of my Mother, we would be on the street. Paid leave would have made a huge difference in my life, at that point when I really needed it, there was nothing available to me and my son. Having a child in this country is an economic trap, and in fact, I have chosen to have no further children because of the insane financial demands placed upon me as a single mom.

Annemarie, Bellport, NY

Supporting families builds communities. By giving parents time to bond and get to know their children, you strengthen families and give children a head start.

Lauren, Yorktown, NY

Thank God my company sees the benefit to baby and parent in providing paid maternity and paternity leave. I received 12 weeks of paid maternity leave and was able to then add on my vacation and sick time to extend my time off with my daughter. We had a hard enough time establishing breastfeeding and bonding due to my c-section, if I had to go right back to work at 8 weeks or worry about where our next pay check was coming from I would have been that much more stressed out.

Our children are our future, and when we realize the incredible disservice we are doing them by taking their mothers away from them or creating stressful situations during their first few weeks of life we will hopefully be on the right track.

Joann, Owego, NY

Twelve years ago, I worked for a small nonprofit and planned to bring my new baby to work with me after my six weeks of paid vacation time that I had saved up. The board, all seasoned parents, said 'No way!' (men and women), 'you will get nothing done.' Instead, they offered me an additional six weeks of maternity leave AT FULL pay. When I returned, I negotiated part-time hours until I left after my daughter was nine months old to pursue a consulting business.

I will never forget what they gave to me, not having to worry about our bills (my husband was self-employed), and allowing me to adjust to the enormous stress of becoming a first time parent. Dedicating time to your children makes you a better parent and makes your children better citizens of society. It's really important!

Megan, New York, NY

We had a child and barely were able to make ends meet while living off one income. Eventually we

were forced to leave our apartment and move.

We ended up having to move to Norway, which in the end provided us with the opportunity to have a second child, which we think is very necessary for our first:)I had a paid maternity leave here in Oslo and it has been a nice experience, rather than a scary, stressful and sad experience. We have been subletting our apartment and hope to hold onto it long enough to come home again.

Emily, Brooklyn, NY,

What is more important than raising healthy children to the future of the world and our country? Paid maternity leave is the least that any company can offer for the benefit their employee is offering to the country and world by raising a healthy, happy child.

Verena, New York, NY

When I had my daughter in 2008 I took almost 6 months of leave, about two weeks of which were paid and only because I was required to exhaust my sick leave and vacation days while I was out. Yes, I was lucky to be able to afford to take so much time off unpaid, and lucky that my employer, at the time The City of New York, had generous leave policies (48 months for first time mothers, the would hold a job at your same salary level, not necessarily your job though).

But it meant that I returned to work with a little baby at home and with absolutely no sick days or vacation days/personal days if I needed them if either she or I got sick or some other emergency came up that required me to take time off from work. Babies go to the doctor a lot their first year, and it was stressful to find the time to fit those in. An alternative family leave policy is required that doesn't require to exhaust your banked

days, and paid family leave is necessary so that all mothers can afford to stay home with their babies during those precious first months when babies need their mothers more than anyone else.

Alysa, New York, NY,

When I had my second child, I did not qualify for any paid leave, as I was a part time employee. Even though we saved everything we could before the birth of my son, there was not enough to keep up. I had to rush back to work as soon as I could when he was six weeks old. With a 1.5 hour commute, and not enough time or space to pump, I quickly lost my milk supply and the ability to nurse my son, and the financial effects of two months without pay led our family to bankruptcy, which will affect us until my son is over ten years old.

Jessica, Woodhaven, NY

When my husband and I decided that we wanted to try to get pregnant it was a very exciting time in our life. We were thinking of names, looking at cribs, and planning for so many wonderful things. I always thought that when it was time for me to have my children I would be able to stay home with my children and raise them just like my mother did for my brothers and I. But things are just not the same, times are hard! If you want to give your children just the basics, you need two incomes. Especially if you own your own home.

When my first daughter finally arrived, we thought we saved enough to get us through at least a year of me being home so I wouldn't have to send my daughter to a sitter. Before making the decision to stay home for a year, I had to use all my vacation and sick time at work. Then I collected unemployment for several weeks. All I wanted to do was enjoy my time

with my daughter, time I could never get back. Unfortunately I spent many of my days worried about money, worried if we could pay our mortgage ! I loved my time at home with my daughter, it was the best decision we ever made but it would have been so much more enjoyable if we did not have worry so much about our finances. I wanted what ever other mother wants , to be with their child during the most important time of their life.

“...The financial effects of the two months without pay led our family to bankruptcy, which will affect us until my son is over ten years old.”

Alysa, New York, NY

Yvette, Bronx, NY

When my mother became very ill And I was her primary caregiver I had to exhaust all of my vacation plus leave no pay. The hardship this caused was overwhelming financially as well as emotionally. This is the memory of her passing I'll always have and fear for my children.

Janet, Astoria, NY

When my son was born, he needed heart surgery. He recovered quickly, but I didn't. I ended up with post partum depression and only 'came out of it' about a month prior to going back to work.

I had to pick up my life and after finally being able to enjoy my son, I had to leave him. I had paid leave and was lucky my company offered it after only having been there 7 months. However, I could only take 3 months since I needed to leave some vacation time and sick days for potential sick days of my children (any myself). I couldn't afford to take unpaid leave.

I really hope that paid leave will be extended, like it is in England/Europe. Look, I don't need a year off, but that's just me. I could've used 6 months to really feel like things were back on track. While I'm not classified as having PPD anymore, I know that I'm still traumatized and could have used more time to recover, regroup and to be the best mother possible.

Janet, Liverpool, NY

When my son was born, I was fortunate to have my parents living nearby. Without their help, I would not have been able to manage. My husband and I were both working full-time at the time I delivered our baby. My husband was not able to take any paid time off to help me. Therefore, my parents (retired) were a God send. I realize that not everyone has parents to help them and it should not fall on Grandma and Grandpa to carry the load. I returned to work in four weeks even after having a C-section because of the financial burden of staying home. I had one week paid by vacation time I had coming and was not paid for the other three weeks.

Kit, Jeffersonville, NY

Without paid family leave my wife and I, with our first child, worked alternate shifts to ensure our daughter was never without one of us. This also served the secondary purpose of minimizing the



daycare bill. Breastfeeding was not even a question since she went back to work within the week. I worked 1st shift, she worked 2nd shift and we both slept 3rd shift. With our second daughter my wife took unpaid leave and ultimately stayed home because as a Nurse Aide she made less than the daycare bill. I eventually found a living wage job but it was tough for the first year.

Thankfully when our third was born I had a good job but we were definitely worse off and had less time as a family unit because of the lack of paid leave. Mind you we had the finances for her to stay home with the children because I was working 75+ hours per week. Things are better now that I managed to go back and complete my college education but the first ten years of parenting were more difficult without paid leave.

NORTH CAROLINA

Angela, Hillsborough, NC

I've had three children and only allowed to take the time I had saved from sick & vacation leave for their births. Six weeks with my first two children and nine weeks for the third. When I returned to work, sleep deprived, physically sore, and still shedding pregnancy weight; I was expected to re-enter my job with the same stamina I had prior to giving birth, having depleted all my sick/vacation time. All ten of my birthing years were prior to the Family Medical Leave Act.

Now my children are having my grandchildren and I would like my daughters & sons to be able to enjoy this time in their lives without worrying about paying the bills. It would be nice to say that Family Leave has been implemented and improved in the last 25 years. Why not allow new mother's to ease back into their jobs over a period of

time instead of immediately? There are many ways to make the transition back into the work place without placing the new mother under pressure to perform.

Roxane, Raleigh, NC

A friend of mine told me that she has to choose between keeping her job and taking her daughter to the doctor. That is outrageous!

Becky, Cary, NC

A little over a year ago I had my second child. Using the FMLA I was able to use my remaining Paid time off that was accrued at the time to stay home with my daughter. I had 2 weeks (10 days) to recover from a c-section before having to return to work. Unpaid leave was not an option as I have bills to pay.

I am lucky that I work from home and it is not a 'physical' job. I cannot imagine having to leave the house and go back to work. My husband also works from home so between us we were able to overcome any obstacles. Working at home did foster our great breastfeeding relationship. It's tough feeling like you have to choose job or baby. We did what we had to do, we made it work but it's heartbreaking to know it doesn't always work out as smoothly for some.

Amanda, Asheville, NC

After laboring for 28 hours, my beautiful red-headed son was born via cesarian birth (he was posterior) weighing in at a healthy 8lbs 3oz. Due to the cesarian birth, my breastmilk did not come in for nearly a week. During that time, I woke up every 3 hours to put my son to my breast, then pump to encourage my milk to come in. Because of the surgery, I could not change diapers right away, and so my husband did. My feet remained swollen for weeks, so I wore slippers to doctor's appointments until my shoes fit

again. Although my job was a part time position as a Minister of Christian Education, as a justice issue my church offered six weeks of paid maternity leave. I then took an additional two weeks of unpaid leave.

I don't know how we would have survived without paid maternity leave. Upon returning to work, I was provided with a space for pumping and encouraged in my determination to continue breastfeeding. I successfully breastfed my son until he was 14 months old. My son is 4 and he has never had an ear infection in his life, and I attribute some of his good health to extended breastfeeding. I wish that every mama had the paid time off that I had to figure out first-time parenting.

I wish that every mama was as empowered by her employer to continue breastfeeding even after returning to work. I will advocate for every other mother and father to be afforded the same treatment under the law. Being home with your newborn is essential to their wellbeing, and our bills do not stop just because we've had a baby. Paid maternity leave is one of the smartest, best investments a nation can make in the next generation.

Suzanne, Wilmington, NC

As a certified nurse midwife and a mother I know that paid family leave is essential to moms, dads and babies. I have seen the nurses I work with struggle with going back to work at 4 weeks postpartum because they've used all their vacation time and their families can't survive without the paycheck.

I have seen first hand what happens when the healing time is rushed and women end up with infections, stop breastfeeding and become depressed because they're working full time and trying to raise an infant. I was one of the lucky ones: when I had my son, my husband picked up extra work and we

NEED FOR PAID LEAVE IS INCREASING BY 2050 UP TO 20 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION WILL BE OLDER THAN RETIREMENT AGE 1 IN 5 WILL NEED DAILY HELP



Jacob Siegel, "Aging into the 21st Century" (*Administration on Aging*, 1996). Kenneth G. Manton and XiLiang Gu, "Changes in the prevalence of chronic disability in the United States black and nonblack population above age 65 from 1982 to 1999," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 98 (2001): 6354-6359.

were able to make ends meet while I stayed home for the first six months of my son's life.

Those first six weeks were a blur, but I distinctly remember not even being remotely ready to leave my son at that time. And that's when most working mothers go back to work. Many other countries value this important time in a family's life with paid family leave. A parent's time with a child at the beginning of their life is so critical to optimal physical and emotional development. If we value families, we should put our money where our mouths are and support them!

Nicole, Raleigh, NC

I am fortunate enough to work for an organization with a great family leave policy. When my son was born in October, 2010 I was able to spend the first three months of his life with him.

Those months were both priceless and sleepless. I can't imagine not having that time with him. I also can't imagine having to function at my job with such little sleep. I'm so thankful that my work values my role as a mother. I wish that all companies did the same.

Brenda, Salisbury, NC

I gave birth to my child 39 years ago, and at that time 'paid leave' for

birth of a child was unheard of. You were given the 'opportunity' to take an 'unpaid' maternity leave of up to 3 months. If you did not return by that time, then you were automatically fired. No parent or parents should ever be placed in a position where they must choose between giving care to their child, or giving that responsibility to someone else in order to keep a job.

Jordyn, Wilmington, NC

I had moved to NC when I was 28 weeks pregnant. While I was able to find a job, as a front desk clerk at an acupuncturist's office, I knew that paid time off was not something a small office could offer. As I got closer to my due date we discussed my leave and all they could do for me was 6 weeks unpaid leave. I didn't blame them, I knew that as a small business their hands were tied. It was going to be expensive to hire a temp agency to find a replacement for me. Also, I wasn't sure how soon I wanted to come back, and whether we could afford childcare or not.

In the end I became a stay at home mom. We sacrificed a LOT. We do not have cable TV, we do not go out to eat, we don't buy new clothes. My husband had to work nearly 70 hours a week to make ends meet. He didn't get to spend much time with me or our new daughter. But without paid leave, or affordable childcare, we didn't have a choice. I love

staying home with my daughter, and now I take care of another baby to help pay the bills. But the work that mommies do needs to be recognized and appreciated, and paid.

Rachael, Barnardsville, NC

I had paid maternity leave after my children were born. This was very beneficial for myself and my children because I was able to rest, recuperate, and bond with my babies. Without having to worry about earning an income during this important time!

All women should have the opportunity to spend time with their newborns after they are born and relax and get back to health after 9 months of pregnancy and hours of labor & childbirth. This time should be paid leave as many other medical conditions and situations are. I believe it is so important that maternity leave be treated as important and necessary for women and men to have so that families can spend time together at such an important time in their lives.

Joyce, Greenville, NC

I received paid leave when I had my children. It was great. I could not have return to work without. Those were important days to bond with my children. In fact, I think when should be allowed to use their spouses sick leave to continue out for six more weeks.

You think about, the first two to three weeks or more you spend time getting the child on a schedule. The mother really does not have ample time to rest as her body heals physically and her mind mentally. Especially when there may be other children in the home and God knows the husband is just another child. Women makes up a large number in the work force and we need this time.



Lindsay, Apex, NC

I took the full 12 weeks off with my new baby, but only a small portion was paid. I received 4 weeks of Short Term Disability pay at 70% of my salary and I had two weeks of vacation saved up to use also.

My husband and I did have some money in savings to use for my time off, but it seemed to go rather quickly and by the time I went back to work, our savings account was lower than we usually like it to be. But, I must say also that pay or no pay, even 12 weeks is not nearly enough time to be off with a newborn.

Most other countries get at least 6 months. I was mortified at the thought of having to put a 12 week old baby in daycare, which added a lot of stress to the end of my maternity leave. Fortunately, I was able to work from home 30 hours a week for my first month back and then I found a nanny to take care of my son at our house. I like my job and I do like having a career, but I would've quit my job if I would've had to put my 12 week old son in daycare. He still seemed so fragile to me.

Kayron, Seven Devils, NC

I was a new mother and was working for a family owned company with only 3 employees. When I took maternity leave it was only for 4 weeks because I did not get any type of pay. This put a financial burden on my new family including the costs of delivery and new expenses incurred with a child.

I started working from home after 2 weeks just because I needed the money, I wasn't even allowed to drive yet because I had not healed. But there I was sleep deprived, sore/hurting, and on edge trying to work from home with a screaming infant who constantly needed to be fed, changed,

“We need family leave because children and family members needing care are not distractions... No worker should have to go through what I did.”

Kelly, Charlotte, NC

burped, or bathed. It was ridiculous! However, I considered myself lucky, because what about those mothers who had complications, or their babies are still in the NICU at the hospital because they were born too early or with problems.

Then, after I went back to work, I had to take my infant with me, because there is no childcare available for infants under 8 weeks old. I was so stressed and there was not a place at work that I could breastfeed, so therefore I had to give up the breastfeeding. This is terrible, I had to put my baby's wellbeing on the line because I needed to make a paycheck. Other countries insure that mothers get time to take care of their newborns and themselves before returning to work.

Kelly, Charlotte, NC

I was back working in my home office the evening my daughter was born. When she was 6 weeks old, I flew with her (along with my husband) on a business trip at my own cost. Regardless, when my daughter was three months old, my boss told me that she was going to have to change some things.

She said, 'I feel like your daughter is a distraction for you.' Within a few months, I was replaced. I worked for a small employer, so all of this was perfectly legal...and perfectly devastating to my family.

We need family leave because children and family members needing care are not 'distractions.' In fact, children are necessary to the economic reproduction of any society. They are assets as future tax payers and workers. No aging parent should be left alone to suffer because their adult child has an employer that thinks a stroke victim is a 'distraction.' No worker should have to go through what I did. Today I teach at a university where I enjoy some protection and benefits. Compared to what I experienced, I feel blessed. But compared to others around the world, the fight is not finished. I will fight for family leave for other families and for my daughter's future.

Agnes, Raleigh, NC

I work for North Carolina State University as a faculty. The Head of my Department is very supportive of families, so he arranged that I had paid leave for one semester after the birth of my daughter. I was one of the lucky ones. However, this arrangement was individually made, and is not guaranteed for every employee. I strongly support this cause, the paid leave made a huge difference for us.

Robin, Pittsboro, NC

I worked for a small, social justice not-for-profit organization and was so fortunate to have received three months paid maternity leave when my son was born. Despite not being required to do so by FMLA (since we had under 50 employees) and that this small, grassroots organization had to pay a contractor to continue my critical work during leave, the organization mod-

eled itself after more progressive countries, even though 3 months is actually minimal in comparison to other countries. They weren't required to by law, and it was a hardship, but they did it because they believed it was right. And I was a far better employee for having had it. I had incredible gratitude to my organization for having received the gift that I did.

When my son was three weeks old, my husband was laid off with no severance. I would not have had the option financially to have stayed home when I did with unpaid leave. Since we weren't bound by FMLA, I wouldn't have even had the option for unpaid leave even if we had been able to afford it. My son was briefly in the NICU after birth and so establishing a breastfeeding relationship was more of a struggle than it would have been even as a brand new mother. Having the ability to overcome the initial difficulties while on leave I am sure contributed to my ability to continue to breastfeed my son exclusively for six months, then to add supplemental foods thereafter, with no formula or cows milk, as recommended by health authorities.

That strong foundation, and the ability to pump at work (I had a private office, a hands free pump, and could just work away as I expressed milk with no loss of time), allowed me to do so. It wasn't easy, even so, as my milk supply dwindled towards the end of his first year, but increasing my pumping sessions made up for it. Would I have liked even more time at home with my newborn? Of course. Luckily in some ways, my husband didn't find a new job until my son was six months old, so even after I had to return to work, he was at home with his dad. I still cried every day for weeks after I had to leave him to return to work.

I can't imagine what it is like for mothers who have leave their babies after six weeks, or even less, and who have the financial pres-

ures that unpaid leave means. It seems like so little, in a way, when you think of providing some sort of paid leave to an employee for a few times in their lifetime (depending on how many children they have) against the costs of replacing valuable employees. If other countries can figure out how to make family life economically workable with paid maternal and paternal leave, I have faith that we can figure it out too.

Gwen, Ayden, NC

More than once I have gone on maternity leave knowing that I would only be paid for 4 weeks even though my company would require me to take 8 weeks. It adds a huge amount of stress to you pregnancy and leave knowing that you have to be especially careful about your spending at a time when you have new expenses.

Melissa, Salisbury, NC

My son is now 2 years old, and I still look back on the weeks after his birth with sadness. My employer does not provide paid family leave, and so I was forced to use all of my emergency leave and then go on disability for the remaining weeks that I was home. Because I was 'fortunate' enough to qualify for disability, my family only had to do without 20% of my salary for the time that I was on leave. However, when I returned to work after 12 weeks, I had no emergency leave and had to put my son in daycare so that I could continue working.

He became sick immediately and stayed sick continually, and I had to make arrangements to care for him without being able to take leave. Unpaid family leave is meaningless. While I was able to keep my job, having to use my emergency leave and go on disability put a tremendous burden on my family for many months following my son's birth,

and I was one of the lucky ones!

Bobbi, Kannapolis, NC

My son is now 40, but I had to quit my job since there was no maternity leave at that time. I went back to work when he was only 3 weeks old since I had no income. It caused me to lose my apartment. Had to move in with my parents until I could save enough to get another apartment.

I was fortunate enough to find a great babysitter who did not charge me a lot. Took me almost a full year to get back on my feet. If there had been maternity leave that would have paid me while I was out and then let me come back to work, I would not have had to struggle. Women should not have to suffer like this just because they elect to have a child.

Beth, Durham, NC

My son was born 9 weeks early in 2005, weighing 2 lbs 14 oz., a very tiny, sick little fellow. Over the two months he was in the hospital, I sat by his bed in the NICU every day, putting my hand on his tiny body in the isolette, and holding him against my skin. The doctors said research showed skin to skin contact improved outcomes and helped babies go home faster.

Unfortunately, on many days I was the only parent in the whole NICU. Most of the parents had to go back to work almost immediately after the birth of their child. For those lucky enough to have maternity leave at all, most had to choose between being with their child in the hospital or being with them when they came home. For those without any maternity leave or with unpaid leave, they realized that their child was likely to come out of this experience with special needs, and they needed all the paid work they could get before the child came home.



It broke my heart to think how painful it must be to go to work and think of your child all alone at the hospital. One of the mothers cried as she described going to work every day, getting off, driving the hour to the hospital, spending time with her baby, eating in the hospital cafeteria, driving home, then doing it all again. Her son was born 4 months early and ended up in the hospital for 5 months facing lots of challenges. No mother should have to do that.


As we have moved through all my son's therapies-speech, OT, feeding-to help him overcome his early birth, I've often wondered what I would have done if I still had to work and had to find ways to take enough time off to get him to all his appointments.

Billie, Williamston, NC

The company that I work for has fewer than 50 employees, so they are exempt from the FMLA. When my daughter was born, I could choose between six weeks of unpaid time off or I could return to work part-time (20 hours a week) for two weeks and would then be paid for the full six weeks.

It was an agonizing decision, but we simply could not afford for me to have no income for six weeks, so I returned after four short weeks. I borrowed a breast pump and pumped in a private bathroom, usually while sitting on the toilet seat. It was unsanitary, disgraceful, and humiliating. But I was determined to breast feed exclusively and I did so for nine months. I began to supplement with formula not because my supply was insufficient, but because of the amount of time that I was away from my desk during the day.

There were some 'not so subtle' comments and jokes made about why I was away from my desk so often. The love of my daughter and my determination to continue to breast feed for as long as possible



STUDIES SHOW THAT **PAID FAMILY LEAVE AFTER THE BIRTH OF A CHILD HELPS LOWER THE WAGE GAP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN**

Sakiko Tanaka, "Parental Leave and Child Health Across OECD Countries," *Economic Journal* 115, no. 501 (2005) & Waldfogel, Jane "Understanding the 'Family Gap' in Pay for Women with Children," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, no. 1 (1998), 137-156

really pulled me through. Looking back, it was a very emotional, stressful, and lonely time. I really lacked the support of my company during a critically important time. I constantly felt like I had to choose between my child and my work.

Elizabeth, Durham, NC

We're expecting our first in August! Like many employees, I do not get maternity leave. I have saved up enough vacation and sick time to stay with my new baby for 8 weeks. Colleagues donated an additional 3 weeks. To do this, I have skipped vacations. When I return, I won't have enough time saved to visit family for the holidays – even though it's baby's first. What's worse: I know I won't be able to afford taking time off if we have a second child. It took me three years to save up the time I have now.

Rachel, Hillsborough, NC

When I gave birth to my daughter three years ago, not only was I fired from my position but my health insurance was terminated the day she was born. Unfortunately, since I had chosen to work in a small business instead of a mega-corporation, the FMLA did not apply to my situation as there were less than twelve

employees. This led to a great number of hardships including loss of income and the added stress of having to secure emergency Medicaid for both myself and my daughter as she was born one month early and spent eight days in the NICU.

I find it reprehensible that people who chose to have children are not protected or given any amount of paid time off to care for their new family member. The present situation pregnant women find themselves in is an incredibly hard place to be. They can either care for their newborn without pay for the first six weeks after birth and then place the care their very precious child into the hands of someone else to return to work OR they can try to make ends meet while providing the best care possible for their child. Not only does this cause undue stress on a new mother and baby, but it jeopardizes the health of our future leaders.

If a mother must return to work because of financial hardships, there is a good chance she will not be able to breastfeed as frequently or for as long as she may like. Time and again, research has proven that breast-milk is not only healthier for the baby, but also helps create that nurturing bond that is so important in the first six months of the newborn's life. Even if a new mother makes

the choice to sacrifice her income to be able to care for her baby, the sheer stress of financial hardship can adversely affect breast-milk supply and interfere with the mother-child bonding process. It is clear to me and many others (including whole countries) that this is an injustice visited upon those who choose to welcome children into their homes.

Perhaps it is time to rethink our priorities as a country and finally recognize that we are jeopardizing the health and well-being of our smallest citizens, the ones to whom we will look in the future to become active and productive citizens.

Jeannine, Durham, NC

When I was pregnant with my first child, I thought I was in good shape. I worked for a reputable non-profit organization that was 'family friendly'. Boy was I surprised after presenting my maternity leave plan to my boss (meticulously prepared to cover my absence). My employer told me that not only could I NOT take more than 6 weeks leave without losing my job (thanks to a gaping loophole in FMLA that requires more than 50 employees within 75 miles), I was also denied a flexible work environment. That meant no working from home or compressed work week.

But again, I was a lucky one. I was ALLOWED to use all my accrued sick time and vacation time as paid maternity leave. Our state has no paid disability so that wasn't an option. I reluctantly, sadly and tiredly went back to work after 6 weeks of round the clock baby care. Still I went several weeks without pay.

My bad experience with my employer prompted me to leave that organization and find another that would honor the idea of 'family friendly' not just because it's the ethical thing to do, but because it's good business. Happy, supported workers are loyal, productive workers. Today I direct a non-profit nurse

home-visiting program for parents of newborns. I see first hand how little support parents receive. Some go back to work as early as 1 week because they simply can't afford to stay home without pay. I can not impress upon you enough the cascade effect this has on the mother's health, babies health and overall success of the family and community.

I urge our government to realize that investments in family leave and early childhood are returned to us 10 fold in a more stable, successful and prosperous society. Navigating the stressful patchwork system of maternity leave has changed my life and now I hope to improve this foundation of society as part of my life's work. It's time we take care of our own.

NORTH DAKOTA

Jennifer, Wahpeton, ND

I had my son in February 2010. I did not have the option of paid maternity leave, but I was able to combine my sick and annual leave. That amounted to 9 weeks off, I also took 3 weeks of leave without pay. I split that time off with some part-time hours. So my son was only 2 months old when I went back to work. I am lucky that I had enough sick and annual leave built up to take that much time off, but when I came back to work I was left with almost no leave built up at all. This made it very hard to bring my son to his well checks and doctor visits. Also, taking 3 weeks off without pay put a huge burden on my family.

My husband and I don't make a lot of money. My husband was allowed to take 2 weeks off, but he had to use his sick and annual leave as well. Also, he was pressured into coming back to work after only one week. We are a two income family, but not by choice. I would much rather be home with my son. For the

first year of our son's life, we were lucky to find affordable daycare and to have help from the grandparents. He will be going to a more expensive one now. I am still nursing my son, but at times it has been a struggle. Finding the time and place to pump at work is hard, but it is worth it.

I am determined to give my son the best start in life, even though it has not been easy for me or my husband. Going back to work after 9 weeks (part for 6 weeks after that) was nowhere near long enough, especially since my son did not start sleeping through the night until 10.5 months old. I was and still am a very tired, working mother. Having more (or any!) paid maternity leave would have made a huge difference in our lives. My husband and I would love to have more children, but we will have to wait until I can accrue enough sick and annual leave again. I do realize that there are people out there that have it far worse than us, but it's time the US got with the program. We are supposed to be a country that leads the world, but we cannot take care of our own families!

OHIO

Johanna, Columbus, OH

As a doctoral student at an institution with no maternity policies, I was, like all of my peers, reliant on the goodwill of my professors and advisers after giving birth. While some of my mentors were supportive, many were not. The unspoken message seemed to be that I was not taking my studies seriously even though I was working harder than ever before, trying to do research while the baby napped and write papers while nursing. I do not wish this level of exhaustion on anybody, nor the humiliation of having to try



to pretend that you are not a new parent. We need to support new mothers and fathers and give them the space to fully dedicate themselves to their babies without the fear that they will lose their jobs / positions if they take some time off.

Ron, Northfield, OH

Being from a low middle class family, the added pressure from money worries – while my wife takes maternity leave – will/is unneeded. The country and society should be more than willing to help families and companies provide this sort of support for families as it encourages family growth and children's education from an early time on. Allowing both child and mother to be secure and healthy before leave is up and a more 'normal' way of life is achieved.

Marta, Westerville, OH

I am an academic woman. At R... University, I had to go back to my classes after I gave birth only two weeks after the event. I saw it as a violation of my daughter's and my human rights. But as an assistant professor one could not even whisper a complaint or you didn't get tenure.

Well, I didn't get tenure any way because I got pregnant in spite of warnings...and one of my senior faculty colleagues had admonished me that 'it wasn't a good time in my academic life to have a child.' She suggested an option which really violated my right to choice, yes, my choice was to have my daughter. No maternity leave there...

Emily, Bowling Green, OH

I am due to have my second daughter around March 12, 2011. I am currently a non-tenure-track faculty member at a state university in Ohio. Besides my teaching duties, I also have administrative responsibilities

as the director of a course of 30-40 sections per semester and around 25-30 teaching assistants.

The university I work for does not provide paid maternity leave and I cannot afford to take it unpaid (to top it off, if one does take unpaid leave, she would be responsible for paying 100% out of pocket her health insurance costs with no subsidy from the university until she returns to work full time). While my immediate supervisors in my department have been as accommodating as they can be, given the university's policies (I am teaching online courses this semester), I will only be taking two weeks away from the office after my daughter is born. This is a huge problem for me because I will be breastfeeding my daughter. On the days that I have to go into the office, I will be running home every 2-3 hours to feed my daughter. This scares me because I had huge problems breastfeeding my older daughter at first. With my older daughter, I was at least fortunate enough to give birth right before the December break, so I had 5 weeks off before returning to work which allowed me to work through the breastfeeding problems I had.

This time, even on the days that I am not in the office, I will still be tied to my laptop and my cell phone for work, complicating that precious time I should be spending with my new baby and my toddler. If an employer as supposedly progressive as a state university has policies this bad, I can't imagine how bad it is for moms in the private sector!

Lynn, Beavercreek, OH

I did not formally have paid leave with my first child but was able to shift my work so that I worked just a few hours during the first few months and then made up that work later in the year. This schedule allowed me to breastfeed.

We need to recognize that parents of infants are making a contribution

to society and we should support them in that contribution with paid family leave. We should also do a much better job of supporting and encouraging breastfeeding which results in healthier people.

Mary, Cincinnati, OH

I did not have paid leave after my last child was born (who is now 18 months) and we had to go to the free store for food for myself and my other 2 kids and receive cash assistance which did not even cover my rent each month! I ended up having to stay with family cause I couldn't pay my electric bill and then I went back to work after only 4 weeks off (c section) cause I couldn't live on the OWF check.

Carol, Columbus, OH

I had 6 wks paid and took 6 more weeks unpaid when I had my son. My son had acid reflux which resulted in lots of spit up and lots of inconsolable crying. I can't imagine if I would have had to return to work right away. I felt like I was just finally figuring out how to care for him at 3 months. Luckily my husband and I could afford for me to take 6 weeks unpaid. Also, I breast fed until 5 months but only exclusively until he went to daycare.

My job is in sales and I spend my days in different places with a variable schedule. It became too difficult to find the time to pump while at work. If I had more time to be home with the baby, I could have breast fed longer. While I am grateful for the time I did have, I still would have liked to take longer! I am lucky to have gotten the time that I did.

Thelma, Otway, OH

I had a co-worker who did not have enough sick days to cover her leave. Administration offered to use sick days she had not yet earned but she said if my baby gets sick I will

have no sick leave so she chose to take dock time. I passed an envelope to collect money to help out as her husband was laid off at the time.

Bridget, Perrysburg, OH

I interviewed for a great 9 month faculty position at a community college and the interview went very well. I was told I would hear back by the end of the month. The end of the month came without a response. I gave it an additional month and, when I still heard nothing, resorted to plan b – having a second baby. By the time that employer, called me back for a follow-up interview, I knew I was pregnant. I went to that interview and was up front about my situation. I disclosed the pregnancy and assured them that as an experienced working mother I was confident that I was the right candidate. Happily, I was offered the position. At that point I checked their policies. By delivery time, I would be past my 6 month review, but short of the 12 months of service necessary to qualify for their paltry 6 week maternity leave. The same rule applied to FMLA.

The only time off I would be allowed is whatever ‘medically necessary’ time my physician would write for, which could be as short as 3 weeks! I appealed to my would-be-supervisor, knowing that he had the authority to approve an unpaid leave. I explained that I would need 6-12 weeks and that I was willing to take the time unpaid. He refused my request. Because of that, I knew I was stuck in my under employed, part-time job for at least another year. If you’re not going to hire the 6 week pregnant woman, you’re certainly not going to consider the visibly pregnant candidate. That decision has rippled through my family’s life. I am back to being fully employed, but at a 12 month job where I am making less.

This has hurt my children’s development and my financial status. I am writing to say that not only do we need paid maternity leave, but that we need to extend the benefit to employees at the time of hire. We no longer with hold healthcare, disability insurance or other benefits – why maternity leaves? This cripples working women from making strategic career moves during their reproductive years and, at base, is discriminatory.

“Children are an investment, even more important than stocks, bonds and hedge funds.”

Eva, Solon, OH

Eva, Solon, OH

I put it in writing that I wanted to take some unpaid leave after my children were born and I intended to return to work. Both times I was placed on the layoff list anyway; however, my employer hired me back on both occasions. Supervisors feel more comfortable laying off a person that they do not have to deal with face-to-face, and I was one of those people at home with a newborn. I did not even get a phone call telling me I was laid off with my first child; it was a surprise. I am so glad I had these letters signed by three levels of engineering management.

My first child, a boy born a week early had serious colic for about ten weeks (it started in his second month of life). When I was ready

to return to work my boss told me I was laid off when I called him. I came in to sign the separation paperwork only to be told that my boss wanted me to start right away. The problem was I could not find a babysitter to take care of my screaming (in pain) colicky baby. I put the baby on several different medications which reduced the symptoms, but he still needed a lot of attention. Fortunately, the colic was starting to subside and I finally found someone willing to put up with it. She complained a lot, but I kept telling her it would get better and it did within a month of her starting. What about mothers who have children with a even more serious condition like a premature baby or a birth defect?

Sometimes having that extra time is all a parent needs (I am including Moms and Dads in this statement). Of course, parents need paid leave and a job with a paycheck after a child is born too. How are they going to support a new dependent otherwise? Other forward looking countries recognize the value of newborns getting a good start; what about the USA? Children are not important in our country? Now with prices high and wages stagnant, people are postponing or deciding against having children. Just look at the recent birthrate statistics. How is our country going to have the scientists, workers, soldiers it needs to continue to rule the world if people stop having families? Where are the income taxes going to come from to support our expensive government programs?

Children are an investment, even more important than stocks, bonds and hedge funds. What do our leaders not understand about this vital function that parents do for our country, just raising the next generation, that’s all!



Maggie , Akron, OH

I was lucky enough to have been able to take 16 weeks off with the birth of my premature child. My job gave me 12 weeks paid leave. I don't know HOW I could have left my tiny baby ANY earlier! When a child is developmentally a 3 month old, they are just barely getting their bearings on the world, finally eating well and sometimes sleeping well. Just when they are comfortable, Momma has to go back to work.

It's very scary to leave, even at 3 months. But, how grateful I was to be able to stay home that long and know that I have a job waiting for me. I wish all Moms had that right. I wish all Babies had the right to have their Moms be with them so they can get a little stronger. What is good for babies will be good for the future of our world.

Carol, Loudonville, OH

I was lucky enough with my first-born to have paid-leave for six weeks – just long enough to establish breast-feeding and get our new addition integrated into our family. At the time I was the primary breadwinner and we depended on my income to pay rent, buy food and diapers. Without paid time off we would have had much more stress, and certainly much greater financial difficulty.

Crystal, Dayton, OH

I was lucky to have the ability to use sick days as part of Family Leave when my son was born. Wow, what a terrific time. I was able to nurse him, working continually to build a low supply, nap with him, and build my confidence as a new mother. My son still reaps the health benefits of my breast milk.

This time was more wonderful because my family leave meshed right up with summer break (I'm an educator). A side benefit was that my husband, too, took family leave

NO JOB PROTECTED LEAVE EQUALS TOUGH CHOICES FOR WORKERS



IN JANUARY 2012

42.9% OF JOB SEEKERS HAVE BEEN UNEMPLOYED FOR MORE THAN 6 MONTHS

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnover - November 2011 (Department of Labor, 2011)

and we were both able to spend precious days building our bonds as a family. During this time we built extended family relationships, community relationships-all of which are sociologically imperative to preventing post-pardum depression and infant abuse.

Never before in history have mothers been asked to leave infants at such an early age. Past generations were able to baby wear, nurse, and carry on duties with an infant. No job in today's society allow for this. This is a necessary time off for new families. Why can the USA not join other wiser countries to develop the necessary time off for the first year?

Rebecca, Columbus, OH

I was very fortunate to work for a small business who values employees. They had set up a short term disability coverage to allow us to take some time off. We had to take all of our sick/vacation time, however and then would get up to 12 weeks at 60% of our pay. I was happy to take the time to be with my new baby, but was left with no

sick/vacation time. I also could not make 60% of my pay for very long, so I returned quicker than I would have liked.

Amber, Kettering, OH

I was very ill during my pregnancy, so as of the day I had my daughter, I had no paid sick leave, or vacation available. Luckily though, my work place offers 6 weeks paid parental leave. No having to worry about how I was going to make up for lost income, and how to buy diapers was a real load off of my mind. A mind that was scrambling with so many other things with a new baby, other children, and commitments. I am truly grateful for the paid leave time.

When my first child was born, I had to take leave with no pay, and then had to quit my job as I couldn't afford childcare after the pay loss. The Parental leave really made a huge difference. I think that all children should be valued in our society, and by paying for the leave of a parent, you ensure that for at least a small amount of time, the care of the child, and mother's recovery,

comes first. I say that the US not only joins the other countries that have mandated leave, but that we lead the way, finding the best practices and showing that we value the parents and next generation who will only make us stronger.

Amy, Columbus, OH

I was very lucky to have paid maternity leave for my 2 children- and my employer was lucky too- no way could I have afforded to take unpaid time off- and trust me, no one would have wanted me working for them during those 10 weeks after giving birth! I couldn't even tell you wanted I wanted for lunch if asked- I was so sleep deprived and my brain was so fuzzy, I really didn't even trust myself to drive very far. Women are not themselves after childbirth – they need time to heal and time to get into their new rhythm of life – i.e. life with much less sleep.

Workers who have barely slept are not productive; and, depending on their job, could be downright dangerous. Please don't make a brand new mom come back to her job as a nurse or air traffic controller a week after giving birth! I think people tend to focus on the impact of not having paid time off on the individual mom, when the impact to society may be much greater and is definitely felt by the employer, no matter what the field. Without paid time off, women will tend to come back to work before they are ready because they can not afford to stay home. Paid leave benefits ALL of us.

Andria, Kent, OH

I was working to put my husband through graduate school. During that time, I gave birth to our first child and took my 6 weeks of UNPAID leave. I felt penalized for being a devoted wife and mother. When we needed my paycheck the most, it wasn't there. Several years later, a job offer was rescinded after I told

my potential employer that I was pregnant with our second child. Fortunately, I found another offer. Also, unpaid leave. At the time, my husband was working on a post doc.

Three weeks after our son's birth, I was taking him to the office and on photo shoots since we could not afford childcare for two. It was fortunate my employer was understanding enough to allow this. This country says it values its families. It does not. It values the bottom line. I am now a graduate student and teach several undergraduate classes. A high percentage of the young women I talk with say they will not be having children. There is little incentive. They feel it will be hard enough to find a job in this economy. I can't say that I disagree.

Tara, Lexington, OH

I work part time in order to spend more time at home with my children. I have had to save sick and vacation time for a year to use after the birth of my third child. I am getting paid for about 4 weeks, I'll take another 4 weeks unpaid and then I'll have to go back to work before I'm ready or my newborn in ready. I am committed to breastfeeding and I will have to introduce a bottle to him at 7-8 weeks of age and I'll spend 10 months pumping at work so he can have breastmilk while at his babysitters. Not having paid time off could be the end of breastfeeding for many mothers and it means going back to work before families are ready. Paid time off makes for a happier, healthier family!

Ruth, Middleburg Heights, OH

My daughter was delivered through an emergency C-section, which threw all of our careful planning out the window. We also had tremendous difficulty with breastfeeding, which is not an intuitive process for many moms. Having paid maternity leave along with un-

paid paternity leave for my husband was the only way we got through those first few months. My daughter and I needed to get to doctor's appointments, sessions with the lactation specialist, and so forth, but I wasn't allowed to drive for 6 weeks after the surgery. If I hadn't had paid leave, my husband would have had to go back to work, which would have left me alone with the baby at a time when I couldn't even pick her up by myself, much less drive us to appointments, do the grocery shopping, etc.

Although I wish I'd had longer leave – 8 weeks after the birth seemed very short – it was enough time for me to heal and for our family to bond before I had to return to full-time work. I'm a federal employee, so those 8 weeks were a patchwork of sick leave and vacation time, and it will likely be more of the same for our next child. I truly wish I had been able to take more time off, though, as we never really did master breastfeeding – I felt so much pressure to have it down by week 7 so we could get her used to the bottle in time for me to go back to work. As with many babies who start bottles early, my daughter's interest in nursing tapered off significantly once I went back to work, which meant she was only even partially breast-fed until 5 months of age. Longer maternity leave would have meant more time to figure out this aspect of parenting.

My husband is an incredible caregiver, and we are very lucky to be able to afford the 'luxury' of having one parent stay home with our daughter, but nursing is something that only a mother can do! And while some women are very successful with it right away, and some babies take to it from the start, it takes some nursing pairs longer to figure things out.

Sending Mom back to work 6 or 8 weeks after giving birth with



a breast pump and a cooler seems to be a surefire way to set up our mothers and babies for a shorter nursing period. I hope to take more time off with my next child, and truly hope that we'll do better with nursing than I did with my first, but nothing will ever give back to us the months of good health (and lifetime of health advantages, according to many recent studies) that I couldn't give my daughter because I went back to work before she and I were ready. And nothing will ever replace the months of sweet snuggles that I lost when she turned from the breast to the bottle.

Sharon, Cincinnati, OH

My first child I only took 6 weeks off from work and returning to work was a stressful blur of trying to work well, trying to breastpump and provide for my infant while gone. I was fortunate with my second to be able to take 12 weeks off, however some of this time was unpaid. It makes the process of breastfeeding much easier and much better established when returning to work.

I nearly cried when a friend of mine in Finland told me she didn't have to think about returning to work for a year after having her child and could have another year off unpaid. If we want to encourage women to breastfeed and provide as best for their children, we need to come out of the dark ages and do what is best.

Leslie, Akron, OH

My son was three weeks early and I was planning to take the full 12 weeks knowing that I only had enough sick, personal, and vacation to cover 5 weeks of that. It was a choice I made because I felt those first 12 weeks were so important to my child's development. I am so glad I did it, but we financially struggled due to the lack of income. Not the ideal way to have a baby come into

the world with a stressed out mother. I focused on my son's needs and that was what was more important. I strongly feel that paid family leave is needed. Please consider this for all the families.

Michelle, Whitehouse, OH

When my middle son was born, I had to take unpaid maternity leave. I had not built my sick time and vacation time back up from having my first son. Furthermore, I was denied several promotions

“Even with three months of paid maternity leave, it's heartbreaking to leave your helpless 3 month old baby in the care of strangers...”

Kirk, Columbus, OH

for my 'excessive use of sick time' (all of which was used for the first maternity leave). This unpaid leave was extended due to my son having to have two surgeries before his first birthday. He also suffered from severe colic, crying 18 hrs. a day (the nurses from the pediatrician's office would call and ask me if they could watch him so I could get a break from the crying).

There was no way I could go back to work as a police officer after my 12-weeks of unpaid family medical leave. This lack of income caused my husband (also a police

officer) and me to use our credit cards to survive on. If it wasn't the mortgage payment (which we had two of at the time because our house wouldn't sell), it went on the credit card. It took us almost three years (during which time I had my third son and another unpaid FMLA leave) to get the cards paid off and our credit back on track. It was only because we sold one of our vehicles that we were able to do it in three years, not five. It completely befuddles me how little value is placed on family in this country.

For all the talk of 'family values', you need to only look at our workplace policies to see that we, as a society, do not truly value family. Any time my husband took for newborn childcare was taken out of my FMLA. This is turn shortened my FMLA time, putting me on 'unpaid leave' sooner. Once I was on 'unpaid leave', my health insurance was discontinued. He was also labeled a 'sick time abuser' for using his sick time when the boys were born. The laws we have in this country show how much we value family, and our most precious asset, our children. What a shame. We really need to take a cue from Europe and Canada.

Kirk, Columbus, OH

When my wife and I had our first child, we were in college and it was during summer break, so we weren't concerned so much with paid time off. Now we're both working and plan on having another child soon. Luckily, her and all our friends are also fortunate enough to have paid time off for maternity leave, but not all are so lucky.

Even with three months of paid maternity leave, it's heartbreaking to leave your helpless 3 month old baby in the care of strangers at a daycare center, but what else can you do? You have to go back to work. The only other option is

to give up on your career until the child is in preschool. A 4-6 year lapse in work history makes it difficult to find a job again, so most parents just bite back their tears and entrust their infant's care to someone else. Not only should maternity leave be guaranteed to all mothers, but it should be longer and fathers should get at least 2 weeks when they have a new child.

OKLAHOMA

Sarah, Ardmore, OK

After the birth of my son, almost a year and a half ago, I was entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid leave under FMLA. My husband was able to use two weeks of vacation to stay home immediately following our son's arrival. After my first 12 weeks off of work, I was able to work part-time for 16 weeks before returning to work full-time. Everyone I talked to during and since this time has told me how amazingly lucky I was to have so much time at home with my son. It was wonderful to spend time bonding with my son... but, I do not believe I was 'lucky.' First, my husband was only able to spend two weeks at home, a fact that we both still regret. Second, I did not get paid for three months and then only received half of my pay for the next four months. Plus, when I started back to work part-time, we had to begin paying for full-time daycare, because we had 30min/day where my husband and I were both at work.

For those four months almost all of my paycheck went to daycare. This means that for all of our bills and groceries we were taking money out of savings for seven months. Of course we would do it all over again, but it was a stressful time, financially, for us. The addition of a baby turns every parent's life upside down without adding the in-

credible stress of financial and job uncertainty. If we really want to be a global leader and innovator, then we need to take care of our greatest asset, our children.

Misha, Norman, OK

As a university professor, I am acutely aware of how fortunate I am. I have flexible hours, supportive colleagues, and my own office with a door that locks. When I was pregnant, I kept a cot in my office and was able to rest when I needed to. When I was nursing, I could pump in privacy. When I had a traumatic birth, my colleagues covered my classes until I was well enough to teach again. Why should this be exceptional, especially in a wealthy country?

My colleagues support the scheduling of my classes and other responsibilities around childcare needs so that either myself or my husband (also a professor) is able to be with our child if he is sick and can't go to preschool (which we can afford because we have good jobs). As a working mother, I have been profoundly aware of the advantages I enjoy because of the kind of work I do, and know that even though I want the best for my child, I want the best for other women's children, too.

Susan, Tulsa, OK

I had no paid leave and child care was very difficult as my baby had colic. It was the hardest working six weeks of my life.

Eileen, Oklahoma City, OK

I have three children. When my first was born, I took 8 weeks off to care for her. I had no idea how difficult breast feeding could be, or how emotional those weeks after giving birth could be. Even after 8 weeks, it seemed too early to go back to work. It was a struggle to

be back so soon. So when my second and third children were born, I took 12 weeks with both of them. Only the first 6 weeks were paid. Fortunately, my husband and I were able to forego my income for a month and a half. I know that most mothers aren't so fortunate. After 14 consecutive years, I am still happily employed with the same company.

Pauline, Tulsa, OK

I was 23 when I had my first child. Yes, I was naive and inexperienced. Yes, I was married, (still am), but I did not expect the changes in life a baby brought. I lived in Toronto, Canada at the time so for one thing I didn't have to worry about the Health Care. However, I did work for the Ontario government and at that time the maternity leave was 6 weeks before and 6 weeks after birth. Whenever I reflect on this time in my life I can now see why I was not a happy Mom and I can now see why I was a 'rushed' Mom. I had to have a C-section when I had the baby and 6 weeks later I had to rush back to work. What was I thinking? And, what were they thinking?

Canada has now realized that this kind of life is NOT healthy for both Mom and child! They have changed the maternity leave now. They did their research and the results proved that this was one of the causes for society to have deteriorated so much. A mom in Canada is now given a year off to bond and care for her child and if needs be another year off at 50% pay. Now isn't this what the USA should be thinking about?

Whenever the family structure is flawed, society is flawed. I really would not like to have a baby anytime soon, but I do look back with envy at the positive changes that the new maternity leave in Canada



has brought. I wish the USA would look to other countries and try to research or even adopt some of their principles or laws.

Cheryl, Moore, OK

I was fortunate to have paid leave with each of my children. We would not have been able to survive without it!! If we truly want to compete with the rest of the world then we need to start with raising our children right, right from the start.

Laura, Okmulgee, OK

I was lucky when my children were born. With the first, I'd already quit my job 5 months pregnant. By the time I was pregnant with number two, I'd begun working again. I worked for a school as a librarian's assistant in Texas. My son was born three weeks before his due date, during the summer break – exactly six weeks before the next school year began. (Paycheck deductions allowed us to continue our salaries over summer break). The daycare I had my children enrolled in would not take him before he was six weeks old. If he had been born on his due date, or after, I would have had to take the time unpaid until he was six weeks unless I found an alternative care arrangement. By the time I had my third child, I was active duty in the army. I got the full six weeks at full pay convalescence leave, then I took an extra two weeks of regular leave (I'm usually sitting on a month's worth at any given time).

I was glad to have the pay because one: the pregnancy was unexpected and two: my husband is the stay at home parent. If I'd not had paid leave, I do not know how we would have handled it financially. We were living paycheck to paycheck and still using credit cards to keep afloat. There

MORE THAN 1/3 OF YOUNG PARENTS HAVE BEEN WITH THEIR EMPLOYER FOR LESS THAN 1 YEAR



Heather Boushey and John Schmitt, "Job Tenure and Firm Size Provisions Exclude Many Young Parents from Family and Medical Leave" (Washington: Center for Economic and Policy Research, 2007).

was no way I could have saved two month's worth of expenses in 8 months. I can understand how, in a similar situation, some women might decide to terminate the pregnancy. Yes, in a perfect world, all babies would be planned to come at a (fiscally) optimal time. However, deployment at the age of 9 months of my baby forced premature weaning.

Stephanie, Tulsa, OK

When I was pregnant with my 2nd child, the doctors discovered a previously undiagnosed heart condition and decided to take me off work a full 36 days before she was due. Somehow, they figured staying home and chasing after my 2 year old would be easier on me, physically, than sitting at a desk but this depleted our savings to the point that I could not afford to take off very long when she arrived...so I bit the bullet, went on welfare, took out all the loans and grants I could, and went back to school full-time.

I supported myself, my son, and my daughter on \$800/month from August, 2002-June, 2004-with the help of foodstamps, Medicaid, and student loans, while earning my Bachelor's degree. The sad thing is if I were in that situation now, with my degree, I would probably have to do much the same thing, because our financial picture has not improved all that much, overall. Paid maternity leave would have

meant that I could have spent that time with my kids, instead of stressing about the money, studying, and the embarrassment of welfare. I am proud of the creative way I worked around our situation, and glad I got my degree, but I wish I hadn't had to go to such extremes.

Mel, Tulsa, OK

Yesterday we celebrated the third birthday of our twin boys and with each of birthday I find myself reminiscing. I recall many beautiful and joyful things: the moment my husband and I discovered I was pregnant, the doctor's office visit that told us to expect twins, the period of bed rest before the boys were born, and, of course, the blur of cuddling, feeding, and loving that followed their birth.

But I also recall some of the less than perfect facts of this period. I work for a small firm and have no paid maternity leave so the period of bed rest combined with the short period of time I was able to stay home with the boys drained all of my PTO time and then some. I will forever be grateful to my employer who continued paying me and allowed me to 'pay back' my hours over time.

Nonetheless, I was back to work only six weeks after the boys were born out of necessity and spent more than a year working to pay back my time. This also meant having no PTO time to use for more than a year. Every doctor's visit or

sick day with the boys was a cut in our income. My husband and I don't expect to have any more children and I can't help but look back with regret that I found myself in a position where I had to seek outside help for my children so early.

It is difficult enough to leave them for a moment but I simply was not ready to leave them for 8 hours every day at such a young age. I can't believe it has been three years and that we've come such a long way. I don't want any new mothers to experience what it is to choose between your children and the income you need in order to provide for them.

OREGON

April Rose, Portland, OR

Although I did not officially have paid family leave, I did have accrued sick and vacation time, which equaled about five weeks of full-time pay. Of course, this was not enough to cover all my families expenses and we quickly sunk into poverty. Yet, I was lucky to have at least some kind of safety net. Most of the mothers I know did not have any paid leave.

There has been much talk recently about improving our education system. The first step is to reduce the number of children living in poverty! Children, and babies especially, need a secure nurturing environment so they can learn. Paid family leave can help keep families from slipping into poverty, reducing family stress. The early years are vital to a child's development and is a significant predictor of future success.

Let the United States finally join the rest of the world in taking care of our nation's children. Consider it an investment in the future of our country.

“Paid family leave can help keep families from slipping into poverty, reducing family stress.”

April Rose, Portland, OR

April, Eagle Point, OR

As a teacher, I have devoted my life to children. And yet, when I had my first child, I was not given any paid leave, which meant I could not care for him. Perhaps this was in part due to the fact that I worked at a private school, and they simply did not have the money to pay me and a substitute teacher. How ironic that I had to have someone care for my child so I could care for my students. I had to cobble together a plan that involved several different caregivers, from grandma to an infant care center. This was not only bad for my children, but also for my students. In addition, the costs of child care plus the commute to my job (and the out-of-pocket expenses all teachers pay) almost equaled my salary.

Finally, I couldn't take it any more, and I quit teaching. I returned on and off to the teaching profession, always quitting when I had another child. This had a severe impact on our finances. After our third child, my husband lost his job. Although I tried to find a teaching job, it was the middle of the school year and no one was hiring. We eventually lost our house. If I had received paid family leave, we would not have lost our home. I believe that the fact that our country does not have paid family leave has had a very negative affect on our economy. It also illustrates the fact that our society as a whole does not value children,

which I think is one of the reasons our schools are so bad.

When I lived and taught in Asia, I found that the people were appalled – actually horrified – at the fact that the United States does not offer family leave. How can a country that is so advanced in so many areas not offer this basic need? What does this say about our values? Other countries get it – why don't we? Especially when so many statistics show that paid family leave benefits children and families in every way possible. If our children are the future, we need to take care of them.

Naomi, Ashland, OR

During my working life I raised 3 children alone and never had family leave of any kind. I was also refused employment because I had children. I was also denied a home rental for the same reason. But beyond shocking is the universal acceptance of the correctness of such behavior. Any country that can find such behavior acceptable has no right to hold its head up in this world, or even individuals espousing such ignorance and arrogance deserving of discourse with decent people. The arrogance and blind stupidity of such behavior is an abomination.

Natalie, Portland, OR

I am currently on maternity leave with my second child. Both times, my leave has been unpaid. I am grateful for Oregon state law's liberal parental leave laws that allow me to stay home for quite awhile after baby is born, but earning at least part of my salary during this time would be very helpful. I work for a nonprofit and my husband is a teacher, so it is a significant financial burden to be home, unpaid, during maternity leave. A teacher's salary is simply not enough to cover all expenses for most families, including ours.



Stacey, Coos Bay, OR

I am the sole bread winner for my household and when I took time off to have our second child I used all my sick and vacation time because I didn't get any paid time off. I ended up able to take six weeks off then went back to work half time for two months and then back full time. I was sleep deprived and couldn't breast feed after returning to work. It makes me very sad that both I and my daughter couldn't spend that time together getting her the best start I could give her. I felt overworked and underappreciated for the first year of her life and we both missed out on some very important bonding.

I am an attorney and I am certain my performance was seriously lacking during that time as compared to my normal standard simply due to the lack of sleep. Paid leave would have made the biggest difference for me. I could have taken sick time when I was sick and some vacation time during pregnancy as well. This may not be the saddest or most compelling story but I assure you for my family paid leave would have been a godsend.

Ingeborg, Portland, OR

I come from Germany and my boys were born over there. (I was a citizen). I was with both of the children home for 3 months, paid leave. The Government now allows 3 years (like unemployment) with reduced pay. The Mother should be home in the formative years. Not like the States you have a child you own on your own sometimes with no insurance. It's good for big business.

Sonya, Beaverton, OR

I didn't have paid leave. I had to go back to work a week after our first was born. I was back to part time in two weeks and full time after a month. With our second

child I went back to work part time when he was 4 days old. I wanted so badly to have some one-on-one time with my children at these precious ages....my husband is racked with guilt (he lost his job in the real estate business and has only had misc. jobs here and there since 2007).

We want more kids but the reality is we can't afford to have them. Even with WIC and other assistance, we can't run the risk of losing our jobs.

Keska, Portland, OR

I had a complicated pregnancy; all of my sick leave was used up, and I had already taken 2 months unpaid leave to stay on bedrest. Added to that, by not working, I had no insurance. I spent a large portion of my pregnancy and the first few months of my daughter's life losing sleep over making ends meet. I was lucky though- my partner was able to take paid leave once our daughter was born. I also was able to be pulled onto my partner's insurance.

The difference between my partner's experience and mine with our employers and our experiences with the birth of our daughter are huge. I was stressed and strung out, not a particularly healthy or good employee, not a particularly good parent. Without my partner's way more generous paid leave with insurance, I would have had to take on debt and would not have been able to make payments on house, student loans. I and my daughter would have likely gone without insurance at a time when our insurance helped us receive care for jaundice, under-weight baby/breastfeeding issues. Thank you for considering mandatory paid leave; I believe all parents should be able to take a paid leave to get their kids off to a healthy start.

Frances, Newport, OR

I received maternity leave when my husband and I adopted a little girl in 1979. It gave us an opportunity to BOND with our new baby and adjust to becoming new parents.

This was such a wonderful experience for our whole family. I have been forever grateful that my employer supported families. I worked for that employer for fifteen years. This was in 1979!!! It's hard to believe that this is such a huge issue for new parents today.

Jamie, Fairview, OR

I spent my pregnancy worried about how I would recover and learn to adapt to my new responsibilities as a parent. We saved money each week to try and cover my loss of income postpartum. I also could not use any of my meager vacation or sick time so I could use it after the birth of my daughter.

It was stressful and difficult. I was only able to be off 7 weeks before I went back to work. I had to stop breastfeeding because of the time constraints and my co-workers did not like the time I spent pumping during work. I know other mothers have a much harder time than I did, but no mother should feel they have to decide between caring for their child and paying the bills. You want a better society, then let mothers be mothers and stay with their children as long as possible!

Dr. Ron & Paulette, Aloha, OR

I think any American who works hard and is regularly at work on his or her job should be able to get paid family leave for emergencies and/or necessary family duties. Employers should support families, and family units, if they are straight, gay or whatever.

Shari, Hillsboro, OR

I was fortunate to have saved up sick leave to use as my maternity leave. Thankfully I was never on bed rest and didn't have a cesarian.

As a doula I see lots of women who have complications and it causes them to have to decide between leaving the workforce or making sure their babies and themselves stay healthy. We are so far behind the rest of the world in this area. It's time to really do what it takes to put families and especially babies first!

Rachel, Portland, OR

I was lucky enough to have 6 weeks of my paid time off (PTO) saved up to use for my maternity leave. The other 6 weeks I stayed home caring for my infant were unpaid and it was very difficult financially for us. during that time my insurance from work also lapsed until I returned at 12 weeks.

We used credit cards, borrowed money from family, and went without many itmes to make it work. I believe that all moms and dads caring for their newborns should have access to paid time off for the entire 12 weeks. Thank you for supporting healthy families.

Lori, Newberg, OR

I was lucky enough to have my baby in the state of California, where I had paid maternity leave. This made a world of difference in our family.

Unfortunately, now that we have relocated to Oregon, I would love to have another baby but I am the only one working so it would be near to impossible to keep our family supported financially without me working. We need to make ALL states have paid maternity leave.

“As a doula, I see lot of women who have complications and it causes them to have to decide between leaving the workforce or making sure their babies and themselves stay healthy.”

Shari, Hillsboro, OR

Carolina, Portland, OR

I was very fortunate to have paid leave. I've been working for the same company for over 10 years. I have never been ill and have never taken more than a few days of sick leave a year. With that, I was able to accrue 4 months worth of paid leave. However, I had to reduce my FTE from 1.0 to 0.8. The luxury of having four months with my little one is one I will never forget. However, what this means is that I cannot afford to have a second child, because I would not be afforded the same luxury.

Those four months of bonding are times I will never forget. They helped ensure a strong and trusting bond between my son and I. I feel sad for the many moms out there that are not able to take the necessary time to bond with their newborn.

Kimberly, Portland, OR

I went on maternity leave for 12 weeks with our first child. My

leave was partially paid – I first used all my vacation and sick hours, then I was able to access a short term disability insurance package through my employer, which I had to sign up for and begin paying for prior to becoming pregnant (once pregnant, it's a pre-existing condition, rendering you ineligible). I stayed home with our son for those 12 weeks, then went back to work full-time.

My husband then took some parental leave, though his was only paid when he used vacation and sick time. After he returned to work full-time, we worked with another family with a new baby to share child care – none of us could afford child care, so we each adjusted our work schedules so we had one day off per work week, and on each person's day, that person would care for both newborns. It was exhausting and left almost no room for schedule changes because we then would have to coordinate adjusting four adults' work schedules. It lasted about 3.5 months before it became too difficult to coordinate; the arrangement fell through and our friendship ended. I then reduced my work hours, which made us financially on the edge, and when I needed to further reduce my hours to accommodate my husband's work schedule, I was told I could stay at 30 hours per week or reduce to 12, which was not enough to live on. I reduced to 12 because we still could not afford child care and someone needed to be with our son. We kept that arrangement until our daughter was born 2.5 years later.

I again went on 12 weeks of parental leave (partially paid with sick and vacation hours – short term disability was only available for full-time employees who were eligible for health benefits, so I was ineligible). My husband had no parental leave at his job at that time.



I returned to work after 12 weeks, only in the evenings to accommodate my husband's day job, but our daughter could not adjust to my absence and the absence of breastfeeding to soothe and feed her, so I quit my job.

My husband luckily had received a raise just in time to fill in for my missing income. But the whole thing fell apart when he lost his job one year later. He was without permanent employment for one year, cobbling together unemployment, public assistance for food and health care (just the children – we did not qualify and had to pay hundreds of dollars a month for COBRA), and temp work. I found a part-time job, he found a full-time job, both of us making less than we did previously, and we are still paying off our debt and making up for savings lost from that year. We live paycheck to paycheck, despite both being college graduates (and I hold a masters degree).

Anna, Hood River, OR

I worked for a small non-profit for 2.5 years when I became pregnant with my second child. My boss promised me that he would bring me back after my unpaid leave, telling me I was 'instrumental to the success of the organization.' During my 3 months of unpaid leave, our family continued to pay for daycare for our older son in order to keep his spot available so I could return to work. A week before I was scheduled to return, my former boss emailed to tell me he only had 5 hours/week available instead of the 20 I was promised. I refused that offer (who works 5 hours a week and can pay their bills?!?) and filed for unemployment. My former employer contested my unemployment claim (jerk!) so I had to wait until the claim was resolved to get the money we needed to pay rent.

We ended up on WIC, food



42 PERCENT OF WORKERS HAVE PROVIDED ELDER CARE

FOR FAMILY IN PAST 5 YEARS

Kerstin Aumann and others, "The Elder Care Study: Everyday Realities and Wishes for Change" (New York: Families and Work Institute, 2010).

stamps, and with serious credit card debt just to stay in our house. Thank goodness these other programs were available – otherwise we'd have ended up with no housing and 2 young kids! As it is, we're still digging out of the financial hole we dug out of necessity. I am still angry about this terrible treatment by people who called themselves my friends. I was shocked to find that there is no legal recourse for this kind of treatment because the company has fewer than 20 employees.

Every new parent has enough stress – fear of losing your home or your job should not be added on top of lost sleep, healing from birth, learning to breastfeed, and all the other tiny and large struggles we experience each time a new baby joins the family. Had I known how things would have turned out, I might not have had a second child. One look at him and I know it was worth all the struggle. Still, I think we can do better here in the US. Let's help each other out, and build stronger families and healthier communities in the process.

Amy, Lake Oswego, OR

I'm an American who's been living in Germany for a number of years. When I found out I was pregnant, I knew I had nothing to be worried about. I had six weeks' leave before my due date, and three years' after. I didn't receive my full pay, but about 75% of it during this time. My sister-in-law,

who lived and worked in the U.S., was pregnant with her second child at the same time. She told me hair-raising stories about how her boss had told her she'd either need to quit or she would have to wait until she went into labor before taking any (unpaid) time off. I was absolutely shocked!

Having and raising children is hard work, much harder most of the time than any other paid employment. During the year after my child was born, I put in more hard work (physically, psychologically...) than I ever had before. I envied my husband because at least he got lunch breaks! I also had thyroid problems during that time and I'd never have managed if I'd had to answer to a boss in addition to my child and husband. It's high time the U.S. government began to recognize, appreciate and compensate women for all the hard work they do. And if Americans are to keep having children, the government is going to have to do their share to make it possible for the working public.

Jean, Portland, OR

My daughter recently had her first child. In addition to all the stress related to becoming a mother for the first time, she is struggling financially because her employer does not provide paid maternity leave. It is hard for me to watch her and her husband coping each day with the fact that they have not one extra penny, or even enough money to cover the basic expenses.

Tara, Gresham, OR

My husband and I were thrilled to welcome our second daughter in April of last year. I was working for a local school district as a school psychologist, and while I was 'approved' for leave, I had not been working there a full year... so none

of it was paid and my insurance would not continue unless I chose to pay for it. At a thousand dollars a month, that was not an option. While I was on unpaid leave, my husband was not able to go on leave as well. His company did not offer paid leave, and so he took just 5 days off after I had Madi. 5 days.

After that, I was at home with an infant and a 4 year old. We had only one income through the summer months, and money was very tight. We ran our credit cards up and it will take awhile to pay them down. And while technically, I still had a month of leave left in the fall (since the summer months didn't count), I was unable to take it as we needed to money so badly. I often get upset that families are put in such horrible positions. Why do we have to chose between the precious bond of mother and child, and having to put food on the table? Hopefully, one day this will change.

Cherish, Beaverton, OR

When I had my daughter I had to have major surgery the very same day. I spent my first weeks in severe pain, weak, and very sleep deprived with no help from friends of family. My husband's job takes him out of town 3-4 days a week. Since he could not afford paid leave to help me with our newborn and to help me recuperate it was a nightmare for me and for him. He called several times a day worried and felt torn and tempted to take leave without pay, though that would mean we would have no income and no savings since the medical bills took all we had (That was after medical insurance paid their part) and were living paycheck to paycheck. I suffered from post-partum depression, had to be medicated and was told by the doctor not to be left alone, yet he could not be there to help because we could not afford missing a paycheck.

Amy, Beaverton, OR

When I was pregnant with our first child, I was the primary bread winner. I planned to come back to work in 8-12 weeks, however, I became sick and my healthy pregnancy turned high risk and I was put on bed rest 9 weeks before the baby was due. This means I used up all my short term disability insurance. I ended up having her 3 weeks early and in an emergency c-section. It took a long time to recover, more than 10 weeks, and my job needed me back. I needed more time but they couldn't give it to me so I had to make the choice to resign. I felt less than adequate and really down.

Thankfully, we had created a hefty nest egg & my husband im-

“Every new parent has enough stress – fear of losing your home or your job should not be added on top...”

Anna, Hood River, OR

mediately took over the bread winning and we had to make swift/drastric changes and make big sacrifices in our lives. I wish I'd had the opportunity to recover and return to work based on my situation, not the American standard 6-8 weeks. This just isn't realistic for most women. Where is the VALUE in all this talk of American Family Values? American women are told that bond-

ing with their new baby isn't as important as getting back to work. Obviously these standards are set by men who have no idea what is like to give birth and then bond with your child. It's more important than anything in this lifetime. I was lucky enough to have a husband who feels the same way and sprung into action and took over as the financial provider of our family but what about all the families that don't have that option?

I once worked with a woman who had a baby on Friday and was back to work on Monday because she couldn't afford to take time off. It was appalling to me that she was forced to make that decision and lose those precious bonding moments with her new baby. That's America for ya. This country needs to stop working everyone to death. Hard work is important but never when it interferes with family & everyone is overworked, underpaid and angry. We need to respect women more and recognize that having a family is still important in America. Not every woman can be back to work in 6 weeks after having a baby! Nor should they. I'm in favor of paid leave for all women.

Leora, Portland, OR

You could say I was lucky. I had 12 weeks of unpaid leave and my husband had a decent enough job that we could manage without the money. A three month old baby really should be with its mother, but that's not what we support in this country. However, because my baby came early and because I worked for a school, my unpaid leave ended just as the school year ended, extending the time I could be with my baby, still unpaid, of course. So I was able to be full time with my son for the first six months of his life. That's lucky for some-



one in the U.S. I know better, however. My cousin in England had 18 months (yes, a year and a half) of PAID leave, with the option to return half time for a full year after that. That seems real family values to me.

PENNSYLVANIA

Brandy, New Brighton, PA

After a long time of trying, I recently had my first child with plans to have at least 1 or 2 more in the future. For many years I have worked like crazy and saved as many sick days as possible. Still, no matter how many I tried to save, I had enough for what was allowable for child number 1 and all the prenatal care appointments leading to our birth – which leaves me questionable if/how we will be able to have another one! In addition, I travel for my job, at times well over an hour. Closer to my due date, it was found that the baby was breech and was recommended that I try to ‘lessen’ my distance in case I went into labor before the now newly scheduled C-section.

Unfortunately once you start your leave, even if the baby comes a week later, the paid time clock starts at that time as well. I found it very difficult to work right up to my due date, which in the end is what I had no choice but to do. Upon filing for leave, I learned that (1) I was only going to be paid for the number of sick days I could ‘cash’ in and (2) although I had saved many days over the years, I was only able to use 30 or 40 sick days (for a 6 or 8 week leave) and that although I had some additional days banked, anything beyond that was unpaid. I had no choice but to take an extra 2 weeks of unpaid leave and found myself having to go back to work while we still had no set sleep schedule, dealing with ‘colicky’ evenings, and right

as we were getting the hang of breastfeeding which is suppose to be a natural process – however was very difficult to get going.

The subject of ease and promoting of breastfeeding in the workforce is another experience... In the end, I cannot believe that I was happy to have a C-section (major surgery!!) just so I was able to use an additional 2 more weeks of my banked sick days to help with the care of my little one. Eight weeks, let alone 6 weeks, was not enough time at all!

Stephanie, State College, PA

Before my first baby was born, I was able to save up a lot of vacation and sick time so that I could take time off with the baby without losing income. My husband is a graduate student on a stipend, so living without my salary is not an option. I was able to take eight weeks off and then work part time for three months. I am now just a few weeks from delivering baby #2, but I haven’t been able to save up very much sick and vacation time in the last two years, because my son is in daycare and gets sick like daycare kids do and I have to take time off fairly regularly.

I have about five weeks of combined vacation and sick time this time around. I will take leave without pay for three weeks because I can’t stand the thought of my 2nd baby getting so much less time with me than the first. I honestly don’t know how we are going to make ends meet that month, but this is time that can never be replaced, so we’ll do what we have to do. Sadly, we won’t be able to do the slow transition into full time daycare like we did with the first.

I also want to say that unless someone has pumped breast milk for their baby, they could never understand how heartbreaking it is to use a machine to express breast milk while your baby is in someone

else’s care, drinking from a bottle. There is just no way to communicate that pain.

Miriam, Narberth, PA

Having the opportunity to stay home with my son for the first four months was really important, as was my husband’s opportunity to work part-time while my son was little. I have worked with women who have to go back to work within a week. They lack the opportunity to recuperate physically from pregnancy and child birth and to attend to their child’s needs. The U.S. is barbaric, in my opinion, and denying human nature in denying parents the possibility of paid leave at home with their newborns.

Barbara, Pittsburgh, PA

I adopted my daughter Eva from China in March 2000 and had saved up enough paid time off that I was able to take advantage of the 12 week family leave. I received a paycheck for most of my leave time. It was wonderful to be at home with my daughter for 3 months, especially since it was during the summer months and we could be outside a lot. At the time I was working for the county health department. I strongly support paid family leave and feel that is a core family value.

Martina, Media, PA

I am European and was shocked when five years ago, heavily pregnant with my first child; I discovered that the state in which I live does not have paid maternity leave. I did not even consider that one of the most wealthy countries in the world would not have this basic necessity and I am still ‘flabbergasted’ to think that its educated citizens still continue to be denied what I feel is a basic human/ female right. This could really be detrimental in any number of situations – an un-

planned pregnancy for a decent young couple with mortgage payments for example – what is their alternative – to terminate? In truth we were ok as my husband has a good job but of course we could have been better!

Amy, Philadelphia, PA

I did not have a paid leave, as my company only offered the mandatory FMLA. Therefore, I used all my vacation, sick, and personal days in order to stay home for 12 weeks. As I took some time before my daughter was born, I would have had to return when she was 9 weeks old. I did not want to leave my 9 week old baby in day care, and therefore made the decision to quit my job to stay at home with my daughter.

I am fortunate that I have a spouse that can support our family while I am home, however I still feel that even 12 weeks is much too early for an infant to be placed in daycare (which is the only option for many families). I also know several women who had to return even earlier as they could not afford to stay out the full 12 weeks because they could not take the loss in pay and they did not have enough days to cover the time.

I firmly believe that I am still breastfeeding at 6 months because I am home and do not have to find a place to breastfeed at work in order to maintain my supply. My office did NOT have a private place to pump. Although I am grateful to be home with my daughter, I am well aware that this decision may impact my career and finding work again when I do return. If I had been given more time at home, I may have gone back to work when she was older and therefore stayed in the workforce longer. I believe that the US needs to adapt its policies to account for the health of families and babies as well as establish open and flex-

“I firmly believe that I am still breastfeeding at 6 months because I am home and do not have to find a place to breastfeed at work in order to maintain my supply.”

Amy, Philadelphia, PA

ible work options so mothers do not have to choose between family and work (this includes creating options for women who don't have a choice).

Catharine, Philadelphia, PA

I feel extremely lucky that my employer is very family-friendly, and allowed me to take FMLA and be partially compensated for 5 weeks. With FMLA and saved vacation and personal days, I was able to take about 2 months paid/partially paid, and then took another 4 months to spend with my daughter that was unpaid. I feel that this six months was crucial time for me to bond with my new baby and help me establish breastfeeding before having to go back to work.

I hear a lot of talk of increasing that figure of 13% of women who breastfeed exclusively, and not enough talk about WHY it is that women are not more supported by our society to breastfeed. I also hear many politicians talk about the importance of families and 'family values' in this country. What better way to create strong fami-

lies than to allow new fathers and mothers to spend time with their new baby?

It is beyond comprehension that our family leave policy in the United States is so lacking. I am amazed when I hear of other countries who have guaranteed maternity and paternity leaves (some up to a year!) and am saddened that our country does not value families in the same way. Please support our families and in turn support efforts to increase the rate of breastfeeding!

Irene, Pittsburgh, PA

I got 12 weeks of leave under the FMLA. I had enough sick and vacation time to cobble together partial-pay for the entire 12 weeks. I had decided to start my leave on my due date (a Tuesday after a Monday holiday), and fortunately my baby came the Saturday before so I was able to get every last bit of my 12 weeks. As it was, those weeks flew by in a blur.

Breastfeeding didn't come as easily to us as I had expected, and we spent a large portion of those weeks working at that. I imagine that if I had a shorter leave, I would have given up. I can't imagine how women with only 6 weeks (or less!) manage – even 12 weeks seems like far too short a time. If I have another child in the next couple of years, I won't have as much sick time accumulated and I worry that I won't be in a position to take as long a leave. Paid leave is essential for mothers, babies, and families.

Valerie, Brookhaven, PA

I had no paid maternity leave and was not able to return to work after 3 months due to the baby having reflux. He needed more attention than a daycare would provide and most were not willing to care for a baby who threw up all



the time. My husband had a job with health benefits, so we added myself and the baby to the plan. The following month, they fired him stating that he was too expensive an employee. The month before he had receive a raving review. It is a shame that this country doesn't protect families when they need it most. We were 2 unemployed parents with a newborn to provide for. We didn't qualify for ant public assistance, we were told.

Amy, Port Matilda, PA

I had to cobble together vacation and sick days in order to stay home for 2-3 months with both my children. That meant I could take very little vacation or sick time during my pregnancy, and left my vacation and sick day stores depleted when I returned to work. This has made it difficult when I need to take time off for doctor's appointments, etc., let alone a much-deserved vacation. It's disgusting that the United States does not have standard paid family leave.

Meredith, Landenberg, PA

I have amazing benefits through my company. I was able to take 12 weeks of leave fully paid. It gave me time to bond with my baby and start to set a routine. Bonding with your child after birth is so important for both parent and child. I was upset enough that I was going back to work when the baby was 3 months old. I could not imagine having to go back right after having the baby. Both emotionally and physically. Thank goodness for great benefits!

Whitney, Bellefonte, PA

I have been blessed in that the first two pregnancies, I was not working. However, I am almost due with my third child and I will be facing having to drain my sick leave and vacation in order to get some

compensation while I am home with my newborn. I can then decide to go back to work, or take the rest of my FMLA as unpaid. This is going to greatly impact our family finances, as the anticipated income tax return will be used to help pay for the rest of my time off; whereas in the past, it has been used to help pay for expenses around the home and/or a vacation. My oldest will need to forgo going to a prestigious swim camp this summer and we will not be able to afford to put my daughter in pre-school in the fall.

Andrea, Blue Ridge Summit, PA

I have two children, and after each was born I felt pressured to rush back to work after being off only six weeks. Due to lack of money and pressure from my employer, I missed out on spending time with them when they were babies.

Kim, Altoona, PA

I haven't had the opportunity to enjoy long term maternity leave. After my baby was 6 weeks old, I lost all pay. I reserved my right to nurse my daughter until she was 1 year old, I was only able to do this because her father paid the house payment and I received food stamps. Women should have the benefit of pay while doing their most important job first, being a great mom.

Jan, Johnstown, PA

I homebirthed with my first daughter and took 3 weeks off when she was born, unpaid. My husband took one unpaid week off. I worked 3 different part-time jobs so that I could work short shifts and still nurse. I have never had paid vacation or sick days, I learned quickly that moms don't get sick days. When my daughter was six months old I started working nights so my husband and I could do the

baby hand off, I pumped in my car because there was no space to do it at my job.

I took six weeks off with the birth of my second daughter, my husband by then was teaching so he had 3 weeks off before the start of the school year. I pumped as much as I could this time and froze it so I had a stockpile when I returned to work and convinced my boss to let me work a shorter shift so I didn't have to pump in my car anymore. I started babysitting when my younger daughter was one month old, full time by day and then worked at night. My older daughter started school this year so I left my night job so I could be home more. My babysitting job ended abruptly after I asked for a \$20 a week raise after watching the child for two years. My husband has gone back to school at night to earn his masters and at this point we are just getting into more and more debt.

We have made the choice to be poor and spend time with our children, figuring I can work more when they are both in school full time. I don't understand why the United States continues to fall short of the other developed nations. I managed to nurse both children and pay the bills by not sleeping much for years, but I was supported by an amazing husband who always coped when I was at work. He never once called and asked me to leave work. If I was a single mother there was no way I could have done it.

Stephanie, New Castle, PA

I just had my first baby on November 3rd 2011. Ive been with the same company for 3 years and I chose to apply for FMLA which would allow me an unpaid leave for up to 12 weeks. Just as I am supposed to return to work my supervisor calls to inform me that I never qualified for FMLA and that I will



FOR WOMEN UNDER 35 YEARS OF AGE **THE WAGE GAP BETWEEN MOTHERS & NON-MOTHERS IS MORE THAN THAT BETWEEN MEN & WOMEN**

Sarah Avellar and Pamela J. Smock, "Has the Price of Motherhood Declined Over Time? A Cross-Cohort Comparison of the Motherhood Wage Penalty," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65 (3) (2003): 597-607

have to be fired and rehired. This means that I will lose my vacation pay and since I get paid in commission my percents will be lowered so I'll make even less money when I return to work.

In fact I will be making even less money than when I was hired. I feel as if I am being punished for having a child and taking the time off I wanted to care for her. I was even more disappointed to discover that this sort of thing happens to countless women in this country.

Kathryn, Phoenixville, PA

I received 60% of my full time salary for 6 weeks after the birth of my son. I guess I should be happy I received at least something, but the next 6 weeks were unpaid and it caused extreme financial stress on our family. After I came back to work I was laid off after 1 month back in the office. So, lots of surprises for our family for sure. We're still trying to recoup my lost wages from last year. I'm consulting while my husband is trying to increase his workload. Not an easy task but we're working on it.

I'm still breastfeeding my 9 month old son, but I'm guessing that if I worked full time I would probably have stopped a few months ago. I fully support paid family leave to protect the health of American children, moms, dads and families. It's an important benefit that should be provided to American families.

Margaret, Bethlehem, PA

I stayed home with our two children. My husband worked sometimes 20 hours a day. The result was that my children grew up like the children of a single parent. It would have been so much nicer if they had gotten to know BOTH of their parents up close and personal during their formative years!

Beth, Philadelphia, PA

I was able to take 8 weeks off after my son was born 2 years ago. I did this through a combination of sick leave, paid time off and disability. Once the 8 weeks was over I had no vacation time left and no sick time left. When I went back to work I was sick with worry about leaving my 8 week old in the care of someone else but because I had no other options, I did what was necessary. It would have been nice to use my full 12 weeks of FMLA but it would have been even nicer to have a realistic paid leave that would take into consideration my child's age and my ability to return to work life while caring for a newborn.

Working mothers need more time to adjust and adapt to their babies because for at least a year, babies are constantly changing. I was sleep deprived and an emotional wreck and while I was able to pump and breastfeed my child for 18 months it was extremely difficult and at times nerve wracking to keep up my supply while working full time. Eight weeks is not

enough. 12 weeks is not enough. Caring for newborns is an important job and parents should be allowed to do it however they see fit. It's not unreasonable to expect a little help especially when the rest of the world seems to have figured out how to do it.

Angela, West Chester, PA

I was lucky enough to have 6 weeks paid leave. I don't know what I would have done without it. We had feeding issues with my son which meant we had to feed him with a feeding tube then nurse him and sometimes supplement with a bottle. He was extremely colicky and hardly ever slept longer than 20 min at a time. And when I say he hardly ever slept I really mean it – there's a small percentage of babies who sleep less than 5 hrs every 24 hrs and my son was one of them. I had no family close by and my husband had to work long hours late into the night.

Unfortunately, I couldn't go back to my job after 6 weeks due to my son's colick and asked for an extended leave without pay, hoping to return in a couple more months. They granted me 6 more weeks without pay and I was so grateful. Unfortunately, my son's issues worsened and I ended up submitting my resignation knowing I didn't feel comfortable having a nanny or daycare care for my extremely colicky son. I wish there was more flexibility for mothers especially dealing with a new baby with health/feeding issues and somehow safeguarding their careers.

Perhaps that is too much to ask, but I have friends from Germany who had been granted 3 years leave with a guarantee of a job once they returned...maybe not their exact same position, but at least employment. That would have eased the stress my husband and I dealt with.



Instead, he worked harder and longer hours to compensate for my job loss while I carried on at home in desperate need of some help, support, and sleep. It was a challenging time not at all what I thought the first year with a baby would be like. We got some relief once my son turned 1yr old when he finally started sleeping through the night.

Sarah, Bellefonte, PA

I was more fortunate than others that I had 12 weeks paid leave, but only because I was able to save my vacation and sick time to cover my leave. I did not take 1 sick day while pregnant and was fortunate that I felt healthy enough during my pregnancy not to take days. I felt rushed into coming back to work.

I would have preferred to take a longer period of leave – paid or unpaid – than I had and in hindsight, I wish I had. Twelve weeks is not long enough. While I am vaguely aware of a policy that we should be able to take an entire year (unpaid), I did not know of anyone who actually did it and did not feel like it was truly an option. I worried about the impact it would have on my job if I did request to take that much time. It was a rough transition to go back to work for me, especially because I returned to what I felt was an unsupportive environment. I breastfeed until 10 months (I was able to take advantage of my work's breastfeed programming and am grateful for that support).

I would love to see a day when 3-4 months was the minimum and a year (or even 2) was the maximum. I think we should have the option, even if we don't take it. Having my son changed my life – and for the better. But it certainly tipped my work/life balance, where my life was certainly more of a priority. I did and am doing both, but it would have been a much better experience if I had been given more time and more support.

“I will always feel that the extreme stress I was experiencing about our financial situation was a contributing factor in my premature labor...”

Michelle, Lansdowne, PA

Michelle, Lansdowne, PA

I was put on total bedrest at 20 weeks due to a cervical issue. It was my employer's policy not to allow employees to work from home, despite that fact that the nature of my job could easily have been done from home, so I had to begin my (unpaid) FMLA leave early. My son was born, prematurely, 11 weeks later, and spent a month in the NICU. Because he was born during the height of flu season, and preemies are especially vulnerable to the flu virus, our doctor recommended he not be put in daycare until the age of 5 months.

My employer did not have to hold my job for that long, but they did. Even so, that meant I had no income for nearly 8 months, and had to pick up 100% of the tab for my health insurance during that time on top of it all. Whatever savings we had at that point were completely obliterated, plus, I racked up a load of credit card debt during that time which I still haven't been able to get out from under, more than 6 years later. Paid leave would not have 100% eliminated all of those issues, obviously, but it probably would have at least eased the severity of the financial situation we wound up in.

I will always feel that the extreme stress I was experiencing about our financial situation was a contributing factor in my premature labor, and it certainly exacerbated the already high-stress situation of having a premature newborn.

Rachel, Pittsburgh, PA

If I didn't have paid leave I don't know what I would have done. I had to stay home to care for my child, I breast fed, and all that was more important to me than anything, but all in the same breath, I still had bills to pay & food to put on the table. I only want to do for a few months to tend to a newborn child, and build the bond the mothers miss because they have to return to work so quickly after child birth.

Gwynne, Swarthmore, PA

In January of 1992, my father received an imminently terminal diagnosis. I was living in Washington, DC at the time, while he was in Pennsylvania. I wanted to take off to be with him in his final weeks, but the president had just vetoed the original version of FMLA. The District of Columbia, however, had passed the bill, and so despite the objections of my supervisor, my employer at the time was able to protect my job with the District's version of FMLA.

It is 21 years later and I am still immensely grateful for the opportunity to spend my father's last weeks with him. As an only child, I was able to preserve my job and help my mother as my father slowly passed away. No one cheered louder than I did when it was passed nationally. I used FMLA one more time more happily when my first son was born, but I couldn't be more grateful for the law being passed where and when I needed it, 21 years ago this month.

Helen, Derry, PA

My daughter gave birth to a perfect baby boy this past summer. However, she had a lot of tearing and it took a month for her to heal. She was not allowed by the doctor to even sit for two weeks.

Then the baby was tongue tied and despite five professionals caring for the baby and mom they did not catch it for two weeks so the baby nursed her nipples raw. It was a good six weeks before she could even say she felt well herself. Those first few weeks and months are critical for the health and development of both baby and mom.

Emily, Pittsburgh, PA

My employer allowed six weeks of paid maternal leave, and then permitted me to use vacation and sick days for an additional six weeks. This wound up proving critical as I have a serious chronic health problem that had been in remission but flared up immediately after delivery. In such cases I have to follow a severely limited diet, which, in addition to the stress of being a new parent and the round-the-clock breastfeeding demands of my son, would have made returning to work more immediately impossible. I needed those three months to help get my health back.

And even then I had to return to work on a part-time basis, which ultimately proved untenable for my employer. This was a major non-profit organization. While they tried to work with me to keep me employed, while they offer better-than-average benefits and even a lactation room, I eventually quit because I could not achieve a real work-life balance.

Our children are only young once and they need more than full-time day care – particularly the

either lackluster or incredibly expensive kind that is typically available – they need their parents for some part of the day. Our nation needs to reorganize its priorities and help employers retain talented, ambitious staff, who still want to have a healthy life and family. In the long-run they will be better employees, and our society will be better for it too.

Tamzin, Philadelphia, PA

My employer does not offer paid family leave. As a nurse I was committed to providing my daughter with breastmilk and realized that returning to my twelve hour shifts would make it nearly impossible to continue to breast-feeding. Financially, I needed to work as my savings and sick time were just enough to cover the 12 weeks of unpaid leave.

I returned to work as a part-time, per diem employee which meant that I had less benefits. I still found it difficult to work three eight hour shifts a week while taking care of an infant. I believe that sleep deprivation and a heavy, acutely ill patient assignment contributed to a serious error I committed at work. I accidentally exposed myself to a patient's blood. The patient was both HIV+ and Hepatitis C+. In order to take the prophylaxis course required to prevent acquiring HIV, I had to stop breastfeeding my daughter in 24 hours. It was a terrible time for me.

Juliann, Newmanstown, PA

My husband and I needed both of our salaries to stay afloat. When our son was born, adding another child to our family (my husband had custody of his daughter from his first marriage) having paid family leave for a few weeks after his birth was the only thing that kept us from falling behind on bills.

My husband had to work so I was all alone – I'd never changed a diaper before. I had no idea how many diapers a newborn would go through! I had no idea how much baby food cost and how I'd feel like I had to make more use of convenience food items for the rest of the family because I was too exhausted to do much of anything else.

The experience of being a new parent, the lack of sleep, the insecurity of not really knowing what you're doing, the medical bills from the pregnancy and delivery, it felt like an avalanche of insanity and debt continually falling on my head. Paid family leave kept our added expenses (despite a stockpile of diapers, bottles, etc) from tipping us into the red. I don't know what we would have done without it.

Eileen, Phoenixville, PA

My sister adopted a baby girl. She was only notified 5 weeks before the baby was born. Needless to say, she did not have 8 to 12 weeks of vacation time, etc. She is not being paid. She lives in MD.

Adopting a baby should be treated the exact same as one having the baby. Women need to be treated fairly in order to spend time to mold, raise, and ensure proper beginnings for our future generations. Rushing women back to work because families cannot afford the luxuries of staying home unpaid for 8 to 12 weeks is not good for our country.

Jennifer, Philadelphia, PA

My spouse and I adopted Michael, a special needs child from the foster to adopt program SWAN in Philadelphia. Michael had experienced true abandonment, physical and emotional neglect. At 3 and a half years old, he was emaciated



and afraid. Michael could barely speak and was not toilet trained. If anyone needed a parent to stay home and love and care for him, Michael did. I took a semester off my teaching job. My partner followed suit. Neither of us received paid leave. Michael is doing well. he is in school, he receives emotional, behavioral, and speech therapy. He is happy and attached. He tell us he loves us at least twenty times a day.

Michael is no longer a foster child. He has a forever family who loves him and is helping him heal. We have given him with all of our hearts everything we can. However, in order for us to provide him with the parenting stability he needed we had to use a lot of our retirement savings – just to pay the bills. I wasn't allowed to use my accrued paid sick days about (a month and a half) because I was not the sick one. It was very stressful to work through this and use our retirement money.

There are so many children in foster care who need permanent homes. How can we help them find forever families if we don't provide the time off parents need to care for these children? Please pass a law that allows all adoptive and biological children the stability of a parent who can be home with them during the important phases of feeding, attachment, without worries of losing their savings.

Joseph, Philadelphia, PA

My wife and I are older parents, she was employed full time as a project manager when we had our two children. She had a good and fair minded employer with a mostly female staff. We had her paid maternity leave policy to use both times and she wanted to nursed both children for as long as a year. It was a bit tough for us, but we both worked and knew we would have to share the care for our children as much as possible.

Without the paid maternity

IN A SURVEY LOOKING AT CALIFORNIA'S PAID FAMILY LEAVE INSURANCE PROGRAM



MOST EMPLOYERS REPORT THAT PAID FAMILY LEAVE HAD A "POSITIVE EFFECT" OR "NO EFFECT" ON PRODUCTIVITY

"Leaves that Pay: Employer and Worker and Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California," Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman, www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf

time off it would have been much more difficult and costly for us. The maternity leave was critical to allowing us to take good care of our just born children.

Jesse, Philadelphia, PA

People often comment about how in tune my daughter and I are. I cannot prove it, but I think a lot of it was that I took paternity leave, and then later became a stay at home parent. Now that she is 4, I am contemplating my first full time job, except for the month I went back to teaching after my unpaid leave ended, it is time to really appreciate the privilege that allowed me to do that.

Without the generosity of my family, it would have been impossible and my daughter and I would in all likelihood not have the bond we have now. I know other families want to be just as generous to their children, but it is up to the government to set fair rules. When my daughter was in utero, i saw a map of the world based on paternity leave. The entire world was different shades of blue based on how generous the paid leave was. Only the U.S., Australia, and Swaziland were blank, lagging behind the entire world.

Megan, Kane, PA

Right after I found out I was pregnant, I was hired at one company but did not have any benefits. After a few months I was offered a job at another company for more money but still no benefits. I took job #2 because it was also 5 minutes from where I lived at the time. I had my daughter after working at that job for only two months. I was on unpaid maternity leave, and since my daughter's father was working for less money than I was making, I had to return to work after only a month.

My daughter's father ended up quitting his job because daycares don't take newborns until they're at least 6 weeks old. I was working 5 days a week and allowed to break my day into two 4-hour sections so I could go home to be with my daughter at lunch and nurse her. After a month of the modified schedule I had to go back to my 8-5 normal schedule. The separation and the stress of having to recoup the lost wages from when I had my daughter (I still had rent and other bills to pay) forced me to quit my job and move in with my sister and her family. Had I paid maternity leave I would have had less stress and not had to rely on family members, who also were supporting families of their own, to help me through that time.

Nichole, Warminster, PA

Three weeks into my unpaid maternity leave I was laid off. My maternity leave was planned to be 6 weeks long as I felt that was all I'd be able to afford after using up my little bit of saved vacation and sick days. While I was sad and upset to lose my job of 10 years, in many ways being laid off was a true blessing in disguise. Suddenly, instead of having no income I had unemployment benefits. I was originally earning a lot more than unemployment paid but I made it work and have appreciated the time spent with my first and only baby.

I was able to nurse my baby until he self-weaned at 19 months old. Like a lot of new mothers I had a many problems nursing in the beginning, too many to go into detail. However, I can say with certainty that I would have given up nursing shortly after going back to work 6 weeks post-partum. I had a fancy pump but my body did not respond very well to it even though I tried all the tricks. Also, when nursing my baby took a good 40 minutes in the early months. He also nursed every 2 – 3 hrs around the clock for the first 6 months. It would have been impossible to keep that routine had I been working. I also feel strongly that had there been a long-term (e.g. 12 months) government maternity leave program, like many other countries have, I may have survived the layoff rounds.

Susie, Philadelphia, PA

We were lucky – I was able to use my sick time, then got 2 weeks of disability (at 60% pay). This was no where near enough, but we refinanced our mortgage during my leave so we made it through. My husband had to return to work when our baby was 6 days old. I wish he had been able to stay home longer, as I had a c-section and it was very difficult to care for a baby while recovering from major surgery.

It always makes me angry when I hear about our countries 'family values', and how the right wing is trying to protect them. If we really valued families we would allow them time to bond and adjust to a new life before being thrown back into the workplace. I have a friend living in Sweden and her life with her newborn was so very different, and so much better. I wish we could be more like that!

“There are so many children in foster care who need permanent homes. How can we help them find forever families if we don't provide the time off parents need to care for these children?”

Jennifer, Philadelphia, PA

Amy, Hermitage, PA

When I found out I was pregnant in 1999, my husband and I were thrilled! Unfortunately, my employer (owner of a small business) of five years was less than happy for us. In fact after I excitedly told his wife (a coworker) he decided to not speak to me for over a week because apparently my pregnancy was not in the company's best interest. I found out later, it was because he and his wife were also trying to conceive and he apparently planned THEY

would take leave and I'd run the show.

I worked up until my labor. But just days before I gave birth, my employer told me that he would not pay me for any of my maternity leave. The Family Leave Act did not apply because of the company size. He made it clear that he did not have to save my job by law, but he'd do so as a favor. And he advised I should come back to work quickly because he didn't know how long he would wait.

My salary was exactly half of the household income. And while we did have some overage that we put in savings, we could not survive on my husband's income alone. Not to mention, our health insurance at the time did not cover baby well visits or vaccines! I did have 2 weeks vacation saved up. So I asked my employer to allow me to use my vacation as maternity leave. He refused and stated my vacation was 'not approved.' In the end, I received no pay the entire leave. Thankfully, we did have some savings to tap into. It was a horribly stressful time which should have been wonderful.

Candice, Philadelphia, PA

When I was pregnant with my son, I expected to work right up until the day I went in labor. However, at a prenatal appointment it was discovered that I had very little amniotic fluid, my son was measuring small for gestational age and he needed to be delivered immediately via emergency C-Section. I had not applied for FMLA. At my job, FMLA is really the employee exhausting all Holiday, Sick and Vacation time. After that you were SOL.

My boss messed up my FMLA by not submitting my hours and I received no money. I ended up being stressed related to the birth of a premature baby and not having



any money to pay the bills. I ended up having to take out a loan. Having a baby should be a joyous occasion and employers should realize that. No one should be stressed or worrying how the bills will be paid.

Kristie, Pittsburgh, PA

When my son was born a year and a half ago, I was lucky to have 12 weeks of paid leave. My employer didn't provide paid leave for maternity and wasn't subject to the FMLA, but I had worked at the organization for a long time and had carefully saved sick days and vacation days. What a blessing to stay home with my son in those first months. Like many others, we had some breastfeeding challenges and that time allowed us to really get a good feeding routine established.

By the time I went back to work, pumping and bottle feeding were not as hard as they would have been in those early days. My husband was able to utilize FMLA and took three weeks off of unpaid leave. He still says it was the best 3 weeks of his life and the bonding that took place then is irreplaceable. He would have liked to have more time and we're saving now so that when our next child is born he can take a full 12 weeks off as well. All parents deserve the opportunity to spend quality time with their newborns.

Danielle, Glenside, PA

With my job, I have the opportunity to use FMLA. We must use short-term disability for maternity leave at 60% of our pay for 6 weeks. Fortunately, I had planned ahead and purchased into AFLAC so that it would cover the additional 40% of my pay those 6 weeks, otherwise I would not be able to take 12 full weeks. Unfortunately, my firm requires a 2 week waiting period before STD kicks in and so I am forced to use 2 weeks of my

paid-time off. This is frustrating for me since I only receive 3 weeks of PTO and I have to use the other week for doctors visits prior to the baby being born. I end up having to send my husband on doctor's visits with the baby because I don't have any time left to take or I just take an unpaid day when the baby is sick.

In total we get 8 weeks of paid time between vacation days and STD. The last 4 FMLA weeks I take unpaid. We spend the months prior to that scrimping and saving so that I can. I think 12 weeks is definitely not long enough for a mother to properly nourish and bond with her new baby. However, I don't have much choice since we are a two-income household. I hope that one day, when our student loans are paid off, that I will be able to work part-time and spend more time focused on raising my children.

Sheila, Mount Carmel, PA

You work for a fast food place and they don't give you leave for pregnancy. They say they don't have to, there is no law that says I have to. Then they ask when you coming back and expect an answer. I don't know why they don't make it a law for all working placing to pay pregnancy leave, because guys get leave real easy for anything they want. Us women get the short end of the stick.

RHODE ISLAND

Karen, Charlestown, RI

Hearing about taking a shower every 3 days brings back 20 year old memories. Not only did I not have paid parental leave, I had to beg for and borrow the 5 and 6 weeks leaves I took after delivering each child. I was adamant about breast-

feeding, and thankfully my supervisors allowed me flexible time when I returned to work (coming in early – immediately after my 6 AM feeding was done, and leaving in time to get home for the 3 PM feeding). I was able to pump for the 11 AM feeding, which my husband, who worked 2nd shift at the time, was able to do.

What a mad rush it was for the first year of each child's life trying to juggle a badly needed second income, different shifts, housework, childcare and the like. I am on a committee that has gotten paid parental leave as a benefit for SOME employees where I work. There are several different unions and jurisdictions here, and the people who need it the most – the clerical, custodial and maintenance staff – do not enjoy parental leave as a benefit. It's always the group at the lowest socio-economic level, positions that are filled predominantly by women – and men of color – that do not enjoy the same benefits that the professional staff members do. That, in my opinion, is an outrage!

This discrimination continues to this day, and should be called what it is – sexism, racism and classism. We're working on it at our workplace, but this should be addressed on a national level.

Katherine, Providence, RI

I am very fortunate in having had three months of paid maternity leave with both of my babies. My husband is a graduate student on a small stipend, so my family depends on my income for our most basic expenses. Without paid family lead, I would not have been able to take time off to bond with my babies.

With paid leave, I was able to recover physically from childbirth, bond with my babies, and perhaps most importantly, establish a successful breastfeeding relationship with both of

my children. Public health officials recommend that all women breastfeed for at least a year, and yet, without paid family leave, it is nearly impossible for most women to pull off. Pumping milk at work is extremely taxing, physically and emotionally, and is certainly no match for the physical relationship of holding your child as you nurse.

Babies need to touch their mothers, and be held by them, as much as possible in the first few months of life. My ardent hope is that all women who wish to take time to bond with and nurse their children will be able to, without financial worries demanding that they sacrifice this invaluable time.

Shanna, Providence, RI

I work for a state university. When I started my job I was 5 months pregnant. The University has a policy that the first year is temporary, which means you don't get many of the benefits that other employees do, including maternity leave. You do get health and dental, but no leave. And because academic appointments are technically 9 months, you can't take unpaid leave either unless you had a doctors note saying you were medically unfit for work.

I lucked out and had my daughter between semesters. She was breach and so I had to have a c-section. 2 weeks later, I had to return to work. Lucky for me, I could work mainly from home, but trying to do full time work and bond with a 2 week old was extraordinarily difficult, especially when recovering from a c-section. She was also underweight, had colic, and had hip displasia. However, because she, not I, had the health problems, I could not qualify for medical leave.

The catch is that even if I had had leave, the way the way my department would have handled it

“My ardent hope is that all women who wish to take time to bond with nurse their children will be able to, without financial worries demanding that they sacrifice this invaluable time.”

Katherine, Providence, RI

was to have me prepare lectures that someone else would 'read' to my class for 6 weeks. This means I would have had to do twice the work leading up to my 'leave'. I'm not clear on how that is leave at all if you do two times the amount of work before you go.

Sharon, Providence, RI

Mothers sometimes begin to grieve even before the child is born when they know they have too short a time to be with their new baby. Depression in a mother does not get a baby off to a good start.

Christa, Cumberland, RI

Paid Family Leave is and was important to me when i gave birth to my twin boys. Without this paid leave I do NOT know how I could have cared for my twin boys.

Having paid leave enabled me to establish a long-term breastfeeding routine and give my boys a great start to life. Paid family leave for moms AND dads is essential to ALL American families.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Martha, Columbia, SC

I am lucky enough to work at a state agency that allows parents to take paid leave after the birth of their child. However, the catch is that you have to have been working for this state agency long enough to build up enough time for your family leave to be paid for. So in order to have 12 weeks of paid leave built up, I would have had to worked for at least two years and never taken any leave (sick or annual) at all during that time. Needless to say, I did not have 12 weeks of paid leave saved up by the time my son was born.

Despite working for that agency for almost 4 years at the time of my son's birth I had only 8 weeks saved up. In order to take 12 weeks off and still receive pay (and I was the bread-winner for the family so I couldn't go without pay), I had to bargain with my employer. It seemed like an easy bargain at the time but later it felt like I had made a deal with the devil.

My employer agreed to let me work part-time for a portion of my maternity leave so that I could stretch my 8 weeks into 12 weeks – but I had to start back part-time a mere 2 and a half weeks from the time my son was born.

Although it was hellish and I shed a lot of tears over the way my maternity leave worked out, I felt that I had been very accommodating to my employer's wishes about coming back to work so soon after the birth of my child and expected him to continue to be flexible with me after my maternity leave was officially over.

My husband and I had worked out our schedules so that one of us would always be with our son because we couldn't afford day-



care at the time. The only problem was that I was supposed to be at work at 8:30 am but my husband didn't get off work until 9 am. So, again, I made a bargain to give up my lunch hour every day if I could come in at 9:30 am. I would drive in to work and then my husband would meet me there and pick up our son.

It seemed to work out okay but my relationship with my employer quickly deteriorated after that. He would give me impossible tasks and then reprimand me for not meeting them to the letter. It became quite common for me to cry in front of him after a reprimand and he would tell me that I needed to 'work on things at home' so that I wasn't crying at work. One of my coworkers confided in me that our boss was upset with me because of the flexible schedule I had worked out and rather than talking to me about it, was taking it out on me in a very passive-aggressive way.

I eventually had to find another job before things got even worse. If I had lived in a country that had decent family leave, I don't think that I would have had the problems that I did.

I'd love to have another child but my husband and I really can't afford another 5 yrs of daycare and I dread the thought of working out another hellish maternity leave schedule.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Cheryl, Sioux Falls, SD

I was lucky and was a rancher's wife when I had my children but I have watched friends and family struggle with maternity leave and have to return to the workforce sooner than they wanted to due to economics.

TENNESSEE

Sara, Cordova, TN

As a teacher in the state of TN, we have to use our accumulated sick days in order to get paid for maternity leave. If we don't have enough sick days, we don't get paid. We also can only take 6 weeks paid. So, for example even if you have more than 6 weeks worth of days, you cannot get paid for more than 6 weeks. With the birth of my first child, I was able to have saved enough days to cover the maternity leave. I had to return to school after 6 weeks to guarantee pay for my family. Also, when I returned I had 'ZERO' paid sick days left to take for my family. When my son came 2 and 1/2 years later, I ended up having to take a leave of absence for pre-term labor. Because of my husband being hospitalized, I was unable to save sick days for maternity leave.

I spent 6 weeks on bed rest and only got paid for 5 days. By the time my son came, I got to take 6 week of UNPAID maternity leave. Then school was out, so I had no choice but to wait until August to go back to work. We are still paying for the effects of that year and my son is almost 3 years old now. We had to max out credit cards and loans just to survive. I had short term disability, but it was only good for while I was under doctor supervision to stay home for 6 weeks after he was born. Something must be done to help situations like these! Companies pay their employees, but teachers get treated poorly.

Shantel, Antioch, TN

I am expecting a child within the next three months. Paid leave is not available to me. I will be one of those that will seek public assistance until I'm able to return to work. My job has a total of 11 employees and doesn't have to provide any type of FMLA. My vacation time is considered paid time off. I will have to go at least 8

weeks without a paycheck. I'm not looking forward to this. I support a paid family leave insurance program.

Anne, Franklin, TN

I got paid family leave and my job was protected. I couldn't have done it without it.

Matthew, Nashville, TN

I have been a father now for three years, and have 2 young boys aged 3 and 1. I know how much time and energy it takes of a parent (especially a mother) to care for an infant, and that care continues throughout childhood. A mother's (and father's) care is vital to the child's physical and emotional health; if a mother, especially, is not able to take time off of work (simply because she can't afford it), the child suffers for it. When thousands of mothers are unable to do this, society as a whole suffers.

Melissa, Atoka, TN

I have two children. I managed to take some maternity leave by Savin gup my sick & vacation time. I didn't really take enough time after my second child was born. This led to some rough times & post partum depression. It wasn't easy. If you really want to support families, give them time to be together in their formative years!

Karla, Brentwood, TN

I was lucky enough to have some paid leave with my company. I just started back after taking 8 weeks off for the birth of my daughter. That didn't feel like enough time. I can only imagine what it would feel like to have NO paid time off. Please consider this. Being a parent is hard enough without entering into the equation working full-time to support your children.

Annie, Chattanooga, TN

Last August, I gave birth to my first baby. My husband and I were so excited to be adding a 3rd member to our family, but we were both terrified. My husband and I are young; 25 and 23 respectfully, and financially speaking, we couldn't afford to function with one income. We also couldn't afford decent daycare, and even if we could, we weren't comfortable putting our infant directly into the care of strangers. We decided that we would do all that we could so that I could stay home, and my husband would go to work.

After our daughter arrived, we couldn't afford for my husband to miss work to spend much time with his new little girl. Thankfully, he had stored up a few vacation days, and was able to enjoy a couple of days at home before he had to go right back to work, but after almost 48 hours without sleep in the hospital, those couple of days were really spent with both of us trying to rest. It was horrible for all of us. Sleep deprived and battled Postpartum Depression, I needed his help. He was so torn; he knew he had to go to work – after all, we had bills to pay and diapers to buy, but he wanted so badly to help at home too. I know he had trouble focusing at work, because he knew that his priority was at home.

Families are designed to function as units, and we were not able to. He wasn't home enough to see how much I was being effected by PPD, and our marriage suffered because of it. It is critical that the addition of a child to a family be regarded as a significant enough event to warrant paid time away from the work place. To ignore the fact that mothers – especially those struggling with PPD – need the help of their partner is irresponsible and dangerous. It is common knowledge that new mothers are sleep deprived, and it is equally well known that sleep is critical for

“To suggest that one parent should face one of the toughest transitions of their lives without the constant help of their spouse or partner is not just reckless, it's ignorant.”

Annie, Chattanooga, TN

optimum decision making and rational judgment. So, to expect a sleep deprived mother to care for a new infant without help is unbelievably unrealistic.

To suggest that one parent should face one of the toughest transitions of their lives without the constant help of their spouse or partner is not just reckless, it's ignorant. I hope that the dialogue that this topic has created will not just happen at our kitchen tables, but among people who have the power to change it. If you are reading this and you have the ability to push for paid family leave, I encourage you – for the sake of mothers and fathers and especially for infants – that you will do your part to make this idea a reality.

Melissa, Atoka, TN

My employer allows us to use our sick and vacation time for maternity /paternity leave. With my first child I was able to take 12 weeks of leave using the vacation time that I saved for 5 years of working. After using all of that time I had hoped that after an-

other 5 years I'd be able to save up enough time to have another child. We unexpectedly (& happily) conceived after only 3 years. I ended up taking some unpaid leave & returned to work after 8 weeks. As a breastfeeding & working mom, that first month was horrible. I had no sleep, was driving & working while completely exhausted. Most days I cried during my entire commute.

Once my baby could sleep through the night without *needing* to nurse things improved, but we had 8 very difficult weeks. Having children should be a joyous time. Everyone knows that it will be tiring, but the complete lack of paid leave for parents is absurd. Almost every other developed country offers 6 months – 1 year of paid leave for parents.

If you really want to talk about family values, you have to put a little more value on creating & nurturing families! Please work to create a minimum of 12 weeks paid maternity leave.

Heather, Chattanooga, TN

My husband and I have always worked full-time plus, your classic upper middle class Americans who believe that the more hours we work, the better citizens and people we are overall. When we became high-risk around week 28 of our pregnancy and I had to take FMLA early, it rocked our world. It was a huge blow to our budget that I could only bring home a pittance of my salary, and could only stay home for 12 weeks, even though she was born 5 weeks early, and we had no way of knowing how long she would be in the NICU.

We're not the people who leach from the system...quite the contrary. But as educated individuals, it is insane that our country doesn't provide for our mothers and babies



to stay home and secure their careers upon a reasonable amount of return time. America, Europe is giving their moms 1-3 years. Really? If you want the educated females to stay here and make a difference, it would make sense to change those FMLA laws to at the very LEAST secure standard salaries for moms and dads who stay home with their newborns.

Jennifer, Nashville, TN

My son was born in Canada, and I received a full year of parental benefits. Canadians EXPECT paid parental leave. Unlike Americans, they consider it to be a human right. I felt so lucky to have the ability to establish a strong and successful breastfeeding routine with my son. It takes work, support and time – in my case it took a solid three months and many visits to nursing clinics to get things running smoothly. He is now a robust 16-month old and continues to nurse.

Almost every other country in the world has already figured out that government-paid parental leave supports not only parents and their newborns, but also society as a whole. I hope the USA gets on board soon!

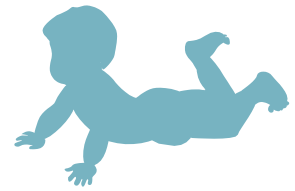
Gay Marie, Oak Ridge, TN

Thank God for paid leave and health insurance, which allowed me and my twins to survive a difficult pregnancy and birth complications! I was working full-time to support my family while my husband went back to college. Ordered to bed three months before the due date and convalescing for weeks afterwards, I was saved from financial ruin only through paid leave and health insurance.

Sherry, Greeneville, TN

When I had my children 40 yrs ago, I did not get paid leave. I was

ALMOST 80 PERCENT OF WORKERS ELIGIBLE FOR LEAVE DON'T TAKE IT BECAUSE IT'S UNPAID



Center for American Progress, Fact Sheet: Paid Family and Medical Leave, August 2012

lucky that the place I worked held my job for me. They didn't have to. It breaks my heart to learn that conditions have not improved in all that time. Working mothers need to be protected by having paid maternity leave and job security.

Susannah, Nashville, TN

With my first son I was troubled to learn that being pregnant in the U.S. was treated like a disability. For all our government's talk of 'family values,' that terminology alone suggests a de-prioritization of the American family and what it takes to raise active, engaged little citizens. My 'disability' lasted for a little over 6 weeks at 60% salary. With a son who was 6.5 weeks early, in the NICU for 15 days and unable to latch due to lack of muscle tone (we spent weeks with the lactation consultant!), it's easy to see how 6 weeks was not nearly enough to give my son and our family the right start.

TEXAS

Kate, Houston, TX

After earning my PH.D. I knew it wouldn't be wise, given my age, to wait any longer to have a second child. My daughter was due in August, but the visiting professor position I had did not renew my contract. I was offered an-

other visiting professor position at a different school, but I had to turn it down because the fall semester teaching schedule was so demanding I wouldn't have been able to breast feed my daughter, or even see her much during her first few months in the world.

So when my baby was born, I was unemployed, and my husband was making peanuts as a graduate student. We barely got by, and then only because of the generosity of friends who let us live in their house! Not everyone has a friend with a house to spare! And it's too much to ask businesses to bear the burden of maternity leave out their generous nature.

It is not right that having a baby should be so crippling for people looking for work or people desperate to keep their jobs. This must be solved from the federal level! Show the world that Americans care about the welfare of new families by enacting standards of paid family leave commensurate with other first world nations!

Jennifer, Houston, TX

By sheer luck, my son was born a week after the last day of school. I'm a teacher who is paid over the summer vacation from an escrow account, so I got a 'paid' maternity leave only through a lucky coincidence. But if my son had been born at any

other time of the year, I may not have been able to stay home with him for a full three months. I just don't know if my husband and I could have afforded it since I am the primary breadwinner for our family. There are many teachers I work with who return to work 6 weeks after the births of their babies. I know one teacher who actually returned to work only 2 weeks after her daughter was born because her family desperately relied on that paycheck. Fortunately, she was able to get a family member to watch her child for a few weeks since no day care would take a baby so young.

Being at home for three months and not having to worry about money allowed me to get breastfeeding well-established. It was tricky for me at first, and had I had to have gone back to work at 4 or 6 weeks postpartum, I probably would have given up. But because I had the luxury of time to get the kinks worked out, I am still nursing my son 8 months later and he is reaping the benefits.

The U.S. government is constantly encouraging moms to exclusively breastfeed for the first six months and then allows no way for that to realistically happen for many moms. This is so unfair and puts a huge burden on moms, not to mention a huge guilt trip. Paid maternity leave allowed my son and I to bond and allowed me to heal physically and emotionally from the birth experience.

I was not even sleeping soundly for the first six weeks. I am not sure how I would have been able to be an effective teacher trying to teach on 3 to 4 hours of sleep a night. We need paid maternity leave in this country! It makes a difference for the health and well-being of our babies and moms.

Linda, Irving, TX

I am a 64 year old, single grandmother who has custody of two young granddaughters, one biological and one noe-biological, ages 5 and 7 years old. All three parents are on drugs and Child Protective Services have put the girls in my care. I had been laid off and collecting unemployment just prior to securing a job with a term guaranteed of 1 year of employment. Almost immediately securing this job, the girls were given to me to take care of.

Needless to say, I did not plan well for my retirement and had planned to use this job to sock away more money for when my day to retire came. Needless to say, this is not happening. Instead, I spend every penny I have on buying uniforms for the girls and daycare. I understand that CPS is going to take this before a judge and get them put in my custody legally but still until it becomes a permanent thing or I am allowed to adopt them, I get no financial help from the government, CPS or any of the other family members.

Why, you ask have I done this... because I refuse to let these little girls go into foster care. I am providing the only stable homelife they have ever had. They love having rules and feeling safe and secure in knowing what is expected

"I am not sure how I would have been able to be an effective teacher trying to teach on 3 to 4 hours of sleep a night."

Jennifer, Houston, TX

of them and what they can expect of me. We need to secure more help for all us Grandparents who are caring from grandchildren, biological or not.

Rebecca, Austin, TX

I did not get any paid 'maternity leave' for either of my two pregnancies. I had to save as much vacation and sick time that I could ahead of time and then take leave without pay. I had saved about 3 weeks worth of vacation and sick time (for which I was paid), and fortunately had qualified for short-term disability benefits (with a pre-existing condition) so for a few weeks I received 60% of my salary, and then the rest of the 12 weeks I took as unpaid. I also had to pay my insurance premium of \$400 for at least one month. All in all, I had to work hard to piece together time off so that I didn't have to spend the whole 12 weeks without a paycheck.

And my supervisor framed my leave in a way that made it sound as if he was doing me a favor. But honestly, what's the most frustrating is returning to work and having to start accumulating sick and vacation time again from scratch. During my leave, I HAD to use my accrued time. I couldn't save any of it.

So when my child started attending daycare and inevitably got sick or had to go to a well-child appointment, I had to use the few hours that I had started to earn again and then start from 0 once again. It was and is a constant cycle, and tricky balancing act, of saving and using time. Paid time off for maternity leave would be fantastic. So would some flexibility in how employees choose to take their time off.



Chris, Houston, TX

I didn't think much about this issue when I started building my family. I do remember having extremely low expectations for support after watching co-workers struggle with parenting. When I had my first child I 'opted out' of the workforce because of these low expectations. I would rather deal with a family budget crisis than deal with balancing two jobs.

Then, a few years (and kids – TWINS!) later I moved to Ireland, where I promptly started earning money just for raising kids. They call it 'Child Benefit' and it made me feel like my time and effort was valued by society – Ireland's society that is.

When I learned about the mandatory time off after having a child, for both parents, required in all of Europe, I realized that while there are many great things about the US, we are WAY behind culturally in our perception and support of the work of parenting. Lack of parental leave is just the beginning. How can we call ourselves advanced or evolved when we cannot get supporting our next generation right from the get go?

Nina, DeSoto, TX

I do have short term disability insurance at my work but it is very, very expensive to have. I did use it only for the birth of my last 2 children and it made things so much easier. I didn't have to stress on how the rent or utilities would get paid or how we were going to get food on the table. I feel that all employers should have this added benefit for their hard working employees.

Susan, Arlington, TX

I got maternity leave but the pay part was my vacation pay only, so after 2 weeks pay it was unpaid

leave. I was able to take a longer leave with my first child but only financially able to take 2 weeks with my second.

Lindsey, San Antonio, TX

I had my first child this year. I took of the entire 3 months I was allowed but ended up taking a big hit for it. I was better prepared than most, and still had to struggle to make it. Would not change it though because those first few months with my baby were priceless.

"I lost my job because I had to care for my wife. Why are we so far behind the times as a country on this topic?"

Marc, Spring, TX

Anne, North Richland Hills, TX

I had three months of paid family leave after both my children were born. I can't imagine not having paid leave or having just six weeks of leave after a baby is born. The physical and mental exhaustion that mothers and fathers experience after the birth of a baby is tremendous. I personally experienced severe sleep deprivation that caused me to hallucinate.

American parents need paid leave in order to give their children a healthy start in life and

a secure childhood and future. Three months of paid leave should be standard. Paid leave allowed me to establish a breastfeeding routine for both my children. Because of that established routine in those first three months, I was able to breastfeed both babies until 15 months of age.

During the first nine months that I returned to work after both children, I missed a total of five days of work, and that was due to flu. My children never got sick, did not suffer from allergies, and are still extremely healthy. Both my employers gave me a room with a lock in order to pump breast milk during the day and gave me access to a nursing support line. It is shameful to think that half of American mothers do not receive such benefits. Our nation's children deserve better. Those children are our future.

Marc, Spring, TX

I lost my job because I had to care for my wife. Why are we so far behind the times as a country on this topic?

Julie, Katy, TX

I received short term disability which gave me 66% of my income but I had to wait 2 weeks before I would start receiving benefits. Still, this proved to be very helpful after giving birth to my 3 kids but not enough. If paid family leave would permit mother's to receive a full compensation of benefits and take care of their family it would be such a relief. I was an hourly wage worker and really didn't make a lot of money so only receiving 66% was really not adequate to cover bills.

I had to pull my kids out of day-care temporarily since I was home to not have that cost but I was still trying to recover from a c-section. It was difficult to have kids at home to take care of and recover from major

surgery and take care of a newborn. I really hope that they create paid family leave because this would allow parents to keep their other kids in daycare so they can recover and take care of the new baby.

Diana, Harlingen , TX

I took FMLA intermittently and it allowed me to spend more precious time with my daughter. I nursed her for up to 21 months and worked part time while still getting full time pay. However, I think I was then reprimanded for that because I have since been let go. My daughter is now 2 years and 6 months. I can't prove it but I firmly believe that is what happened. I live in Texas so this should come of no surprise. Employers have the upper hand down here.

Misty, McKinney, TX

I was a professor at a public university when I was fortunate enough to have paid maternity leave. However, the paid part of the leave was only because of my vacation time, a sick leave pool I was able to access (after some pleading and an application process) and the natural winter break between semesters. If I hadn't been able to cobble together 10 weeks of paid leave, I would have been forced to take FMLA or return after only 4 weeks at home which is all the vacation time I had at that point. Having a brand new baby and being a first-time mother is an eye-opening experience quite literally. My son didn't sleep much in his first 7 months of life, so I was incredibly sleep deprived. The literature on sleep deprivation consistently shows that it causes lack of concentration, extreme fatigue, memory loss and other negative side effects, all of which I experienced. I truly needed that time at home not only to bond with my son (research is pretty clear on how important this time is to babies!) but

also to catch naps when I could, breastfeed regularly and learn the skills of parenting.

The time off work also allowed for my own physical recovery. While I was lucky enough to avoid a C-section, birth is still an incredibly traumatic process and my body needed to heal. Time at home was very necessary for that! Most other countries already know what we need to learn in that new parents – mothers and fathers – need time to bond with their children and learn how to be a good parent. Babies thrive more and parents themselves are better when they are not so stressed. Surely American ingenuity can figure out how to do what is needed for healthy families. Let's not just talk about family values but truly put them into action by giving families the financial means to do it right!

Tricia, Houston, TX

I was a single mother and because I didn't have paid leave after the birth of my first child, I had to go back to work within 2 weeks... after using all the vacation I had left. It was a horrible experience. He was too young for a daycare to take, so I had to try and find an individual to watch him. That was not easy and was very expensive. My health declined because I wasn't getting enough sleep, or enough to eat because I was too tired between working all day and staying up all night with my son.

I eventually ended up in the hospital for about a week because I got so sick. My son had to be without me for that week and I ended up having to have him put on formula.... which I hated to do. I was too weak and sick to breast feed. The experience was horrible for him and I.... That's unfortunate. It's also a reality for many, many mothers... and it shouldn't be.

Melanie, Houston, TX

I was about to be hired by a company that I was working for as a temp until they found out that I was four months pregnant. When I did have my son I had no paid leave at all, and had to spend the first few months of his life living off of savings so that I could be with him, in fact I was forced to move back into a very crowded family home.

Kellie, Euless, TX

I was told my position was being eliminated when I was 7 months pregnant with my son and although they were giving people time to find something else within the company I was going to lose 4 weeks of that time during the birth of my son and not given a chance to make it up.

They did pay me for maternity leave as part of my severance but it was very stressful to try and think about job searching with a newborn and worrying about missing out on positions because I would have a small baby when I started the new job. I have since spent all but a short time when I found some contract work of my sons life unemployed why we struggle on a very tight budget.

Tina, Round Rock, TX

I work at a small manufacturing company with only 6 employees. We get 16 vacation days a year, and that includes sick days. With both of my pregnancies, I had to use whatever vacations days I had for that year. This meant no extra time off during those years, before or after delivery, and I only had three weeks off to be with my precious new babies before going back to work full time because I could not afford to take any extra days without pay.



It was so hard to leave them so soon, I cried most mornings for almost a month. Also, I breastfeed both of my babies so that meant a lot of time pumping to store extra milk. It's a shame that in this country we don't have paid family leave no matter what size your business is.

Gina, Bryan, TX

In June 2010 I came down with a sudden and severe case of pre-eclampsia which necessitated an emergency induction. My husband worked full time and had to scurry to get time off (unpaid) to be with me for the delivery. Our son was in the NICU for a week. My recovery was long and I could not drive for weeks or lift our 2 year old daughter. His work offered no paid time off to help with family matters, and I relied on the kindness of friends and family to help me during this period.

My husband missed out on important bonding time with his son and worried about us both while at work. We needed his income to pay for the accumulating hospital bills, so he had no choice but to return to work. I teach at a major university and have no maternity leave; I was fortunate to have my baby during the summer. Once the semester started, I begged to have a teaching schedule that would allow time for pumping. I was told my 'begging' was inconvenient.

I could not teach over the summer because my school offers no maternity leave; it was easier to just not teach summer school. This, however, meant my husband's income was crucial to our financial survival. My son (James) has severe reflux. His first three months were filled with long hours walking the halls trying to comfort him and stop his screaming. We were exhausted. My husband doubly so as he had to re-

AS OF JANUARY 1, 2013 AUSTRALIA IS OFFERING DADS UP TO 2 WEEKS OF PAID PATERNITY LEAVE



<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/enablers/centrelink/dad-and-partner-pay/eligibility-for-dad-and-partner-pay>

turn to work each morning after a sleepless night. I did my best to mother our older daughter.

It would have been ideal if we both could have focused our efforts on parenting in these earlier months. I think it's shameful that we do not support families in the days following the birth of a child. These are critical times for a newborn – especially those needing care in the NICU – and for recovering mothers.

Without the support of my friends and family – who all generously donated their time – I have no idea how I (or my son) would have made it through those first 3 months.

Martha, Dripping Springs, TX

In the 60s and 70s, when I had my children, there was no such thing as maternity leave – you just did the best you could. Even today, I did not get leave to care for my Alzheimer mother and had to fit it in to my work schedule. Today should be different for women, like other developed countries – (but then we don't even have universal health care) – and have extended leave to care for the most important product our country has!

It kills me how motherhood is touted as being the best a woman

can be, but when it comes to actually rewarding us, ... oh, we are going over the border of what's reasonable!

Rodolfo, Houston, TX

It is very important for parents to have paid leave. I took unpaid leave for 4 weeks when my first daughter was born, and my wife took 12 weeks of leave. Her leave was a combination of her own vacation time, sick days, partial pay from disability insurance, and unpaid leave.

We don't regret the time off we took with our daughter, but because of all that time unpaid, I had to use credit cards to pay for groceries, diapers, etc., and even other bills. Since we had just purchased our 1st house a month before we became pregnant, those expenses plus the expense of a newborn, we ended up in deep credit card debt, a hole that, 8 1/2 years later, I'm still trying to climb out of, but I'm proud to say I haven't defaulted on a single payment, haven't even been late.

I believe if we would have both had our regular pay, we wouldn't be in this seemingly never-ending spiral of debt. Please feel free to use my experience, maybe if we can change the laws, my daughter won't have to go through this when she becomes a mother. Thanks for all that YOU do!

Renee, Arlington, TX,

My baby is what I do every-thing I do for. I am fortunate enough to have worked hard and gotten to a good place at my job to afford for my husband to be a stay at home dad.

We don't have a lot of extra but our son gets to spend important learning stages at home with family. I did get paid family leave but that was only for 6 weeks paid and due to having paid for short term disability with my insurance.

I took the 12 week allowed and could only afford it because we have savings. It was great that I got that time to bond with my son before I had to return to work. I did get to breast feed and continued to do so when back at work through pumping.

Work in retail and would not have been able to create the bond we have if I did not have the time off I did. My hours are crazy and I spend what time I can now with him, but we would not be as close we are without that time.

Lindsey, Austin, TX

My company does not provide paid family leave, however I was lucky enough to be able to bring my daughter to work for the first year since I work in a small office with little to no public interaction, and my bosses were nice enough to allow me to bring her.

However the employees at our branches do not have this option as they have customers in every day. I was very happy to have the luxury of breastfeeding her for so long, which many do not have, and of spending that additional time with her. I can't imagine being forced to have someone else care for her at such a young age.

Kristen, Richardson, TX

My employer – a major medical center – doesn't offer an official maternity leave policy, so I used all my vacation and sick time, plus some unpaid leave in order to cobble together 12 weeks after the birth of my second child. The only reason I could take any unpaid was because my mother was able to provide a bit of income so I could stay home with the baby a few more weeks.

“My husband missed out on important bonding time with his son and worried about us both while at work. We needed his income... so he had no choice but to return to work.”

Gina, Bryan, TX

Though I was lucky to be able to take a full 12 weeks, this involved not taking a single day off in the 9 months leading up to the birth so that I'd have enough vacation and sick time to enjoy a few weeks with our baby. Employers need to be required to offer a maternity policy that provides mothers and fathers at least a month off – before they have to start using their sick and vacation time. Most new moms aren't allowed to drive for 2 or pick up anything heavier than

their baby for 2 weeks. The fact that many have to return to work should be considered criminal.

Kristina, San Antonio, TX

My first child had acid reflux and cried almost all the time she was awake. I did not want to leave her at a day care. I used the full 12 weeks of FMLA leave, with only some of it paid, and then used a month of vacation and sick leave. I wish I'd had more time to stay home with her. I could hardly concentrate at work that first year because I was so sleep-deprived and worried about her.

When my second child was born, I used the full 12 weeks of FMLA again, and then returned to work part-time. I needed to save my vacation and sick time because I knew I'd need it with two kids in day care. My son wasn't taking a bottle, so I had to leave mid-day to nurse him until he got the hang of it. I plan to work full-time again when my youngest is a year old. I would like to see FMLA provide job protection for a minimum of 6 months to 1 year.

My Canadian and European counterparts reported to the same boss that I did, and took off 1 year (paid). (They feel very sorry for us in the U.S.) Our FMLA policy is pitiful in comparison. These little babes belong with their mothers, but mothers shouldn't have to give up their jobs to care for their new babies.

Kathryn, Austin, TX

My job currently does not allow me any sort of paid time off for maternity leave. I will be able to take time off, and (if I understand correctly) I should have my job still so long as I bring proper medical documentation...but I will be completely without any form of income



for any amount of time I take off for the birth of my baby. And being a mother who is very likely to have a c-section that is a scary prospect for me.

Not only will I most likely have to return to work before I'm completely recovered (despite my efforts to build up a savings before the arrival of my daughter) but I will be deprived of the time I would otherwise be able to spend caring for and bonding with my new child. It's heinous, but I have no choice.

Amand , Spring, TX

My son was born a preemie due to an unknown medical condition. His medical bills and my lack of pay almost made us lose our house.

Samantha, Trinity, TX

No paid leave after my first child meant she weaned earlier than either of us wanted, because I had to go back to work. After my second? It has meant a much lower standard of living due to a loss of income from staying with him without any paid leave.

Natalya, Mabank, TX

No personal experience to share as yet, but I did grow up in a country where it was a norm and I observed that it was beneficial to the development of a strong family unit. The advantages to the new mother can not be overrated.

It provides the security that is so necessary at this crucial time. I feel that it should be considered a basic human right. The opportunity to raise a child properly should not depend on the wealth of the parents.

Thais, Austin, TX

Not having paid family leave meant that I had to return to work when my baby was six weeks old.

FOR THE BOTTOM QUARTER OF WAGE EARNERS

ONLY 5%
OF PRIVATE SECTOR
WORKERS RECEIVE
PAID LEAVE



Center for Women and Work, Rutgers, "Policy Matters: Public Policy, Paid Leave for New Parents, and Economic Security for U.S. Workers," April 2012

As a result:-we have not been able to coordinate my body's production of breastmilk with his needs (I don't make enough because he's not here to nurse), meaning he's on formula primarily, which has a host of less-desirable health effects for both him and me – we have not been able to spend enough time together, which means it's been harder to know when he needs extra medical attention, and he's harder to soothe.

I am not as well or rested as I should have been at work, and am distracted by knowing that I should be with my baby at least for a few months. Sleep deprivation has consequences. Making it possible for parents to stay home with their new babies to give them the right start is a no-brainer.

Monica, Houston, TX

Paid Maternity/Paternity Leave recognizes the importance of this time of bonding and assists financially at a time when family income is reduced, particularly if the mother/father is taking unpaid leave. Paid Maternity/Paternity Leave will allow mothers and other partners to support the primary carer in their

new caring role, and to recover from the birth. Paid Paternity Leave will encourage fathers to take some time off after the birth of a child, and help embed paternity leave as a normal aspect of work and family life. It will also extend the amount of time that both parents can spend providing exclusive care in the early important months of a child's life.

Chelette, Plano, TX

Plain and simple I did not have paid family leave when my daughter was born. I had to accept public assistance and went back to work when my daughter was only 4 weeks old. I hated to have to do that, but I had no choice. I am telling my story because I do not want any parent to have to leave a child that young because there is no money for diapers, utilities, rent, car payments, food and gas. This is America and not one of us should have to leave our babies so young. Asking employers to provide paid family leave is not asking too much. It would afford parents the opportunity to stay home with newborns without the added stress that comes because of dire financial straits.

Joan, Carrollton, TX

The first few months with a child are the most important for the emotional and physical health of the child. Even though I am now a grandmother, I realize the importance even more as I see my daughter trying to spend time with her new baby while also managing all the new responsibilities. As a senior citizen, I see family leave an investment in my future. It is our children and grandchildren who will take care of us so we need to take care of them now.

Amanda, Katy, TX

The latter part of my pregnancy with my first and only child was extremely stressful, but not because I didn't have a healthy pregnancy (as well as labor and delivery). During my last trimester, my father (my last surviving parent) passed away. The company I worked for at the time denied me any bereavement leave and then two months later told me that I should look for a different place to return to the workforce following the birth of my child.

Although I felt this was blatant sexual discrimination, I learned from the EEOC that they were such a small company they were not under the jurisdiction of state or federal laws meant to shield protected classes of workers (like pregnant women). Needless to say, the stressful and joyful 12 weeks after the birth of my child were also filled with the worries of trying to find, apply and interview for potential employment while stretching the 60% short term disability pay I received for only 6 weeks.

Much of my sick and vacation leave was exhausted from standard pre-natal appointments and caring for my dying father. Of course, paid family leave policies would have alleviated a great deal of this stress and left me better equipped to be a new mother and juggle all of my responsibilities.

Carrie, Corpus Christi, TX

My husband and I are both self employed, so when our baby came, our income went down by 50%, since I stopped working and thus received no income. Having a baby is already costly.

Make it possible for self-employed people to get assistance when baby arrives – and ensure that those first crucial months in the baby's life are spent with a parent instead of in a daycare full of other babies.

“Make it possible for self-employed people to get assistance when baby arrives...”

Carrie, Corpus Christi, TX

Kimberly, Euless, TX

The opportunity to bond with your child without worrying about your job, a necessary evil, is ideal. We in this great country don't seem to put enough emphasis on the importance of our children. From the moment of conception until the day they are 18 our priority is not them. It clearly isn't bettering the relationship between mother and child – which, by the way, has far reaching impacts that if allowed, we would most likely be better off. Our goal isn't education as that budget continues to get cut – which is disgusting. What do you anticipate our future will be should you continue to disregard our most precious asset?

Anna, Brownwood, TX

When I had my children, there was no FLMA. My first child was born in 1963 while my husband was stationed in Morocco with the Air Force. Our second child was born in Minot, North Dakota in an Air Force Hospital. My husband was in the Air Force, and could have taken leave when our second child was born; however, I was not employed and he did not take time off.

While I was employed in 1996 to 2009 in Brownwood, Texas, there were a number of parents, both fathers and mothers, who took FMLA when their children were born and that was a great time for them to have for bonding and helping or being helped with a new infant. Also, if one has an elderly parent or handicapped child to care for, FMLA is a godsend. FMLA is one of the great advantages of our culture today and should stay intact for future families who are under enough stress as it is.

Erin, Dallas, TX

When I had my first son, I was the breadwinner. As such, I was only able to take the 8 weeks short term disability I had at only 60% of my pay. Since we needed my income to survive, I reluctantly had to go back to work earlier than I had wanted. When I had my second son, my husband and I made about the same amount of money. This time, I was going to get to take the full 12 weeks (all unpaid, unfortunately because I had a new job and didn't get short term disability payments because it was a 'pre existing condition.')

This time is also being cut short, however, because I had complications during my pregnancy that required me to be on bed rest at home and to subsequently be hospitalized for the last month of my pregnancy.

My baby was born a few weeks early and had to stay in the hospital for almost two weeks after he was



UTAH

Amy, Sandy, UT

As a mother of three, I have always worked part-time since the birth of my first child. I was lucky that first time because I was able to have short term disability which paid me 70% of my wages for six weeks. But because I only received pay for six weeks, I returned to work when my son was 10 weeks old. I was also exclusively breastfeeding and my baby would not take a bottle (and actually none of my children ever did), even with breastmilk. With my next 2 babies, I was not working full time, and thus, not eligible for short term disability through my employer. While the length of time I took off for both births varied greatly, both represented a financial strain for my family. After my second baby was born, I believed I had 12 weeks (FMLA) of unpaid leave, only to find out after being gone from work 11 weeks that I should have returned to work after only 6 weeks (a fact about which my company failed to inform me). I was unready to return to work even at the 11-12 week point due to dealing with extreme sleep deprivation from caring for a baby who never slept well, and seemed to need me more than my first had.

I eventually returned to work after 6 months. We were able to survive financially, but not without incurring some debts. When my third child was born, we had recently purchased a home and our financial responsibilities were higher than ever. Again, there was no paid leave, and at that, I only was guaranteed a 6 week medical leave because as a part time employee, I did not usually work enough hours in a 12 month period to qualify for FMLA. I took about 8 weeks off with this child, and worked less hours upon returning than I previously had, as I was exclusively breastfeeding.

This time, we incurred much debt during the time I was off and

smaller paychecks. Maybe we could have planned better and done more to avoid this debt, but when there's not enough money, there's not enough money! Parenting is hard, under-appreciated work and no one should have to suffer because they are choosing to raise children, especially the children themselves!

And while it is probable that I will never benefit from any change in legislation, I want to provide this wonderful right to others and to my daughters as well! Let's prove that America is better than this. We can and should provide paid family leave to all mothers, regardless of the number of hours they work.

Danielle, Salt Lake City, UT

I am a college professor and consider myself very lucky to have had a full semester (about 5 months) of paid leave. I know that this amount of time is out of the ordinary, but I think it should be standard practice. Here's why: With 5 months of paid leave, I was able to establish a strong bond with my daughter, breastfeed her, and have ample time to get used to being a mom before having to go back to work.

The breastfeeding bit is particularly important, once I did go back to work, I found it impossible to keep up with breastfeeding and pumping, even though I have a flexible schedule, access to a private space, and a supportive work environment. I cannot imagine how hard it would have been if I had had to go back to work after a few weeks and had to stop breastfeeding/pumping that early. Taking unpaid leave would not have been financially possible for me so I am incredibly grateful for the long amount of paid leave I was given.

Kirsten, Salt Lake City, UT

In 2005 I gave birth to twin girls. They were born several weeks premature and had low birth weight. This necessitated feeding

born. Since I took so much leave before my baby was born, my leave after he was home is being limited. I am devastated that I have to go back to work, but I need my job and my income. We should be allowed to have adequate time at home with our babies. I feel like I missed out on so much with my first and will miss out on so much with my second. I do not plan on having any more babies, but I want to fight for this for other women out there.

Rosemary, McAllen, TX

When my children were born in Mexico City, I was an employee of the Department of Education. I had 3 months paid leave from my teaching position. It made all the difference in the world. I did not have to worry about money. I just went to pick up my check every 2 weeks no questions asked. When my son was older, I had access to a state paid daycare center for teachers as a really minimal cost. I wish mothers here had access the the same as they should have in a civilized country.

Kristin, Austin, TX

When my son was born, I was lucky to have 8 weeks of paid vacation, which was bumped to 10 weeks because of my c-section. I took an additional 2 weeks of vacation time I had saved to make up the entire 12 week allotment. At about 6 weeks, severe postpartum anxiety set in. I could take care of my son, but not myself. I was losing weight rapidly, not sleeping much at all, and felt as if I had a whole pot of espresso every day – shaky and unable to focus.

Those weeks from 6-10 I spent recovering and getting myself back on track with the help of my very supportive husband. There is no way I could have gone back to work in that condition. I am so thankful to have had paid leave.

both on a 2.5 hourly schedule until they reached normal birth weight, which took 6 weeks. They also had problems feeding and with reflux, so feeding was a very slow process. For 6 weeks I never got more than 30 minutes sleep at one time.

Thankfully I had 12 weeks of paid maternity leave through my companies benefits plan. This allowed me to stay home with my girls and give them the care they needed. It greatly facilitated my being able to breast feed them for the first few months of their lives. I simply can't imagine how we would of got through those first few weeks had I needed to return to work, or make a choice between looking after them or working. Having lived through this experience it is obvious to me why paid maternity leave has such a direct impact on child mortality rates.

Michele, Salt Lake City, UT

Several years ago, recently after my youngest son, 16, was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, he broke into a gas station and stole some cigarettes. He also has ADHD, Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Depression, plus math and writing learning disabilities. My world absolutely shattered. Plus at my job as a school social worker, our new principal, who didn't like children and didn't want me to see children who were having anxiety or other crises, made my life hell.

My previously rewarding job became a hostile environment. I had nowhere that wasn't extremely stressful. My anxiety was off the scale as I tried to function at my job and take care of all the things I had to do to get more help for my son, deal with the legal issues, court dates, etc. The administrators at the district knew of my ADD and GAD previously as well as how abusive the principal was to the children and to myself. I could've used the time off to take care of my son

"I simply can't imagine how we would of got through those first few weeks had I needed to return to work, or make a choice between looking after them or working."

Danielle, Salt Lake City, UT

and myself, but instead of letting me use my sick leave I would've had to use FMLA, which as a single mom I couldn't afford to do.

VERMONT

Sara, Brattleboro, VT,

Not having paid family leave meant that our family had to turn to forms of public assistance for help...WIC, food stamps, Fuel Assistance, etc. It was very stressful to worry about money while also nursing and taking care of my little one. Thankfully it was temporary. What was not as temporary was the credit card debt we accumulated while I was on leave – it took four years to erase that debt. When I think about how much knowledge and skill I have gained while on the job, I am flummoxed at the lack of investment workplaces have in ensuring that their skilled workers return.

David, Brattleboro, VT

The child down the street was thrown into childcare facilities at 6 months old – at three he clings to

his mother constantly and cries for her whenever she steps from view. Attachment to the parent is very important and family leave makes that possible without being ruined financially.

Rob, Essex Junction, VT

When my son was born, my wife's post-doctoral fellowship did not come with any guarantee of continued employment. After working so hard to get her PhD and then choosing to have a family – there was nothing in place for her in that field. Our son was born and she stepped away from the lab and her research there.

A few short weeks after that, she found out that 'the funding had dried up' for her position and she would not have any position to go back to. We had chosen to breast-feed our son (a decision we stand by) and in some ways, perhaps that made it easier. But that would not be true. Instead, my wife spent several months stressed – adjusting to new motherhood, breastfeeding, and all the while trying to polish her resume and line-up interviews. Not at all how she imagined the first year with our son would be.

VIRGINIA

Michelle, Alexandria, VA

As a sales manager in the hotel industry, I was one of the 'lucky' ones; I was able to use disability insurance to cover a portion of my pay for about half of my leave. With my first child, I worked for Marriott, a company that consistently makes Parents Magazine's Best Places for Moms list. If this is considered 'best,' I'd hate to see what didn't make the list. I was afforded the absolute minimum



in terms of leave and pay; I took the 12 weeks that the FMLA gave me, and used disability insurance to cover 60% of my salary for 6 weeks. (While some companies offer 8 weeks after a C-section, Marriott only gives 6 – how horrifying that they’re sending housekeepers back to flip mattresses 6 weeks after major surgery.)

Of course, disability only kicks in once you’ve depleted your sick and vacation time, so when I went back to work with a 13-week old baby, I had absolutely no time to take off if he – or, God forbid, I – needed a day off. But again, as a manager making a decent wage, I was one of the lucky ones. By the time my second child was born, I had moved on to a new company. They offered the option to ‘buy up’ on the disability policy for \$5/month to get 80% coverage. Thankfully my family wasn’t impacted by an additional \$5/month, but I know many that are. With my second C-section, I was given 8 weeks of disability but because I hadn’t been at the job long enough, I wasn’t covered by FMLA so I had to return to work after just 8 weeks.

My employer allowed me to work part time for the first month back, but I actually made less working 3 days/week than I did on disability, which made it even harder to justify paying full-time daycare (we had to pay 5 days/week to hold the spot, even though we just used the service 3 days/week). Our policies in this country exhibit how little we value the family. It’s a pathetic testament to how low our children’s welfare ranks on the priority scale.

Alice, Annandale, VA

Because I was already pregnant with my second child when I started my current job, I was unable to save much leave time and I was not eligible to benefit from short term disability coverage. As a result I



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PAID LEAVE

Center for Women and Work, Rutgers, "Policy Matters: Public Policy, Paid Leave for New Parents, and Economic Security for U.S. Workers," April 2012

was home with my daughter for just 8 weeks – that was as long as my husband and I felt comfortable living without my paycheck, especially since we were still recovering from my 5 months of unemployment the year before. At 8 weeks a baby is just starting to respond to the environment around him or her and at 8 weeks, a family is just starting to get used to having the little one around, regardless of whether it’s the first child or the 5th.

Going back to work at 8 weeks was bearable only because I have a job with a flexible schedule and an understanding boss. Otherwise it would have been much more torturous, both for me and for my family. But torturous or not, it was really my only option. It is so unfortunate that in this country having a child is perceived as a ‘vacation’ at best or a disruption at worst. It is neither of those things.

Women should be able to have

the time to take care of their newborns, their families and themselves. And they should be paid for that time. It’s not fair or reasonable to make them choose between getting a paycheck that cares for their families’ financial needs and having the time to care for their families’ emotional needs.

Karen, Arlington, VA

Being able to take paid time off after the birth of both of my daughters was crucial to all of us. I needed the time to recover and bond with my baby girls, and they needed me around to get a good start in life. They are growing up into beautiful, smart, healthy girls, and I attribute at least some of that to my ability to properly nurse them for their first few months of life.

If I’d been more stressed or had to return to work sooner, this would have almost certainly taken a toll on my ability to nurse them. Nursing babies is hard work, and pumping is even tougher. Let’s make sure ALL our babies have the chance to start out right – with nurturing and nursing in those first few critical months. P.S. like many mothers these days, I’m the primary breadwinner, so without paid leave, I would have certainly had to return to work sooner. Let’s help all our families and ensure moms have paid leave... it will pay off in the long run!

Robbin, Alexandria, VA

I adopted a baby and could only take 6 weeks of paid leave, which was my sick and vacation leave combined working for the federal government. Later on, I read of a Senator, I think Senator Ted Stevens who gave his female workers paid time off for maternity leave. Which was great, but shouldn’t the rest of us be treated the same?

Susan, Richmond, VA

I am a Family Doctor. I had 3 kids while owning a private medical practice. Each time I took 6 weeks off to recover and ensure the baby was doing well, then I headed back to the office. Why? Because for 6 weeks I was not getting paid and further more, I was not earning money to pay my staff.

As a doctor, fortunately I make enough money to forefit pay for 6 weeks, but how I envy my family doctor friends in Sweden or England who all got paid maternity leaves of 6 to 12 MONTHS to enjoy their children. As a doctor, I have heard hundreds of horror stories from my patients of how they lost a job or had severe financial problems because they had a surgical delivery or the baby was not doing well. As a country, we can do better than this. The European's do it.

Akeisha, Norfolk, VA

I am a single parent with two children. My oldest son has asthma and has been hospitalized several times since the age of 5. My last employer offered FMLA which was a great benefit for me because alot of times he was unable to go to school, had to be picked up early, and had to stay in the hospital for 3days or more. FMLA gave me relief that I wouldn't lose my job over these situations. Im very grateful that my employer offered it, my current employer does as well if you have been with the company for over a year.

Margarita, Charlottesville, VA

I count myself on the lucky few that have had a paid family leave after both our children were born. My workplace has a short term disability insurance that paid me for 6 weeks and my workplace was fine with me taking 12 weeks off work as per the family-leave act. On top of that, for my first born I had my

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mother staying with us for about a month and that help a lot specially because it help establish a long-term breastfeeding with the newborn as I was able to rest and dedicate myself to care for the baby.

Even with all that help I was very tired as the care of a new born requires all attention all the time day and night. I do not know how other families deal with this load when the mother has to go back to work almost immediately after the birth of their baby. It does not surprise me that breastfeeding does not last very long for most babies as it took me a good 2 weeks to get started with a good latch and then a few more weeks to be able to do it comfortably without any help.

Morgen, Lorton, VA

I developed HELLP syndrome and my son was born 7 wks early and spent 3 wks in the NICU and another 11 days in the PICU at 2 mos old. He came home on meds and an apnea monitor. I spent 18 wks on maternity leave and he was still required to be on meds when he went to daycare.

I was a federal employee so, while I was granted leave, I was not paid for it – not an option given

our finances and the cost of living in the DC area. Thankfully both my parents worked for the same agency and were about to retire so they donated unused leave to me so that I could stay home. Without it, I'm not sure what we would have done to pay the bills.

Megan, Richmond, VA

I did not have paid family leave when I had my daughter. Instead, I saved up as much of my paid time off as I could by not missing a day of work, even when I was exhausted and sick during pregnancy, so that I could get at least one paycheck during maternity leave. I was on short term disability for 8 weeks, but since I'm the primary breadwinner, we were still really struggling financially. I wanted to be successful at breastfeeding so I insisted on taking the measly 12 weeks that the law allows, even though we couldn't afford for me to be out of work that long.

My daughter had reflux and was colicky, needing to be held and nursed constantly. Maternity leave was exhausting and when I went back to work, I was a walking zombie for months. Family, especially our children, should always come first. It's infuriating that other countries have paid leave AND longer maternity leaves, yet the US, who is so concerned about family values, can't step up and offer the same thing? It absolutely boggles the mind.

Barbara, Virginia Beach, VA

I didn't have it for my 1st child and it made life a lot more stressful. Things were a lot smoother w/ the 2nd when I had maternity leave and was able to heal w/o the additional stress of worrying about finances.



Joyce, Roanoke, VA

I got NO paid leave. Not even vacation days of any kind. As a mother, who made minimum wage, I never even accrued vacation time. I was fired when I had to be out 6 weeks. Later, after I went back to school and got my nursing degree, I was told by other nurses I worked with, they had to actually quit their jobs to get maternity leave.

Now, decades later, they lost years counted toward retirement years because of having *quit* their jobs. Only the last rehire years are counted even now. They lost years of service time every time they had a baby. They are still punished today. In 2011. Hospitals made the decision it was never going to count those lost years. Don't keep women 2nd class citizens. Our time with our babies is important. What if women decided it wasn't worth the cost of having a child? What if they they decided not to have the next generation because they cannot afford time off without pay? What would the impact be on our country?

Cynthia, Aylett, VA

I had surgery in May 2010. Because insurance requires that your doctor try all resolutions possible before 'major surgery', I'd exhausted my leave time trying all other options that didn't work. Therefore, I had no leave time when I had to have surgery as the last result. I was really stressed out and worried about if I was going to have a job, how was I going to provide for my kids over the next couple of months, how my bills were going to get paid.

I called social services for help and because I had a job I was denied any help even though I wasn't getting paid to be out for surgery. For what little savings I had was totally exhausted. I've worked on my job for 6 years and never missed time from work unless it was for my kids or a short vacation. This left me

with no choice but to return back to work against my doctors release of me because I needed funds to provide for my family. Because of this the surgery turned out to be unsuccessful and I'm still having problems.

I work really hard for this company to not help me or seem as if they don't care. Even if I they would've paid me half my check, I'd been thankful for it. I'm still struggling trying to get my finances back on track, as well as my health.

“When he was just 3 weeks old, I received a phone call saying if I did not come into work tomorrow I could kiss my promotion goodbye. I went in the next day...”

Kindell, Hillsville, VA

Jeanne, Alexandria, VA

I had to use 3 months of leave without pay. It is a very stressful time becoming a new parent!

Anna, Barboursville, VA

I have 'Paid Leave' which means that I am supposedly one of the lucky ones. However, earning that leave was not easy. I took no real vacation for a year before my child's birth so that I could save up enough time to take 3 months off

with my newborn. That meant going to work even when I was sick and very pregnant.

Then after I returned from leave I once again could not take any days off for a very long time, especially since I wanted to have another child two years later. It shouldn't be that hard to just spend a few precious weeks bonding with your child.

Kindell, Hillsville, VA

I was hired as a waitress when I was about 3 months pregnant. I let them know so when I needed the time off it wouldn't be a surprise. I worked my butt off for this place and quickly rose to bar manager. As I was about to begin training for management my boss decided I should go ahead and take my (unpaid) leave. I was a week away from my due date and he was terrified that I would go into labor while at the restaurant. Two days before my due date I received a phone call saying they needed help and were very shorthanded, so I went in. The next morning I went into labor and at 7:58 delivered a beautiful, healthy baby boy.

When he was just 3 weeks old, I received a phone call saying if I did not come into work tomorrow I could kiss my promotion good bye. I went in the next day, after only 3 weeks leave, still unpaid, still recovering, only to find they had already given my promotion to another waitress who had been there less than 1 month. I was devastated. I worked so hard for these people. I took 3 weeks maternity leave to go back to job where I was on my feet for 6 to 7 hours at a time to have my door of opportunity slammed in my face. Needless to say, as soon as I found another job, I was out of there.

A woman should not be punished for having a child. Especially when that woman was hired while pregnant and gave full disclosure

to the management. Had it not been for what they did to me, I could've already been working up from bar manager to general manager, finally getting a decent paycheck and benefits.

Abigail, Williamsburg, VA

I was lucky that my husband is Scandinavian and as a result, we received 8 months paid leave even though he was living in the US. We would have received 12 months 100% pay if we had both lived in Norway. As a mother, I would have been able to retain my job for nearly 2 years had I lived overseas. However, because I have my own firm, I was able to keep working after giving birth without the fear of being fired or laid off.

Bea, Alexandria, VA

I was one of the lucky mothers that had paid leave during my time after giving birth to 4 baby girls, not all at one time. But, each time they came, if I had not have had paid leave I would not have been able to spend that time with them. So many families today are going through hard times, and without that period of pay, who knows if the families will even make it. To take care of crying, demanding babies, then having to wonder how to feed the rest of the family is not the way life should be. Please keep paid leave for parents of new born, or adopted children. Let them have the time to establish family ties. I think I took 2-3 months for each child, that is not that long to cover an outing from employment.

Jenna, Chantilly, VA

My husband had 2 weeks of paid family leave and this was instrumental in helping me care for our newborn and 3 year old after my Cesarean.

Stacy, Mechanicsville, VA

When I had my son, the company I worked for had no paid leave options available at all. I was lucky in that they allowed me to use my personal and vacation time, but the missing income forced me to return to work after only 8 weeks; well before either myself or my child was ready. I was exhausted, and depressed that I had to leave my tiny child at home well before I was ready for that step. (Frankly, I don't believe 12 weeks is sufficient either.)

I made only slightly more money than my husband, and daycare costs for an infant totaled more than three quarters of my income, and were equal to my husband's pay. Because of that fact, we were forced to make the difficult decision to work opposite shifts, resulting in two exhausted parents (he worked all night and stayed home with the baby during the day, I worked all day and nursed all night). At my current place of employment I have disability insurance. Even this will only cover 5 weeks of maternity leave. It shocked me when I found out how much more family friendly other nations were when it came to pay, and amount of time given for maternity/paternity leave. Actually, it sickens me.

Tracy, Chesapeake, VA

When I was pregnant with my first son, I was on active duty with the US Coast Guard and was lucky enough to get 6 weeks of paid maternity. CG active duty mothers are also entitled to 30 days off throughout the pregnancy for any issues, complications, and/or appointments. Luckily I did not have to use any of these throughout the pregnancy because in my last month I had serious back problems and was able to take a couple weeks off with pay!

My son was born 2 weeks early, so my time off before his birth was

cut short, but I was still able to take the 6 weeks off after he was born plus 2 weeks of all the leave I had saved up. Unfortunately I was not so lucky with the birth of my second son. I was fortunate enough to come off of active duty orders and roll right into a GS-12 position, which for those of you who don't know the federal system is a fairly decent position.

What I didn't know and didn't even think would be a possibility was that the federal government does NOT offer any maternity leave! Yes, they will allow you to take all the unpaid leave that you want and are even nice enough to let you get an advance on leave, but offer absolutely no paid maternity or paternity leave! I could not believe that the people who are supporting our active and reserve duty military are not offered the same maternity benefits as the people they are supporting?!

If there is one thing I can do in this lifetime is to help convince the Federal Government that they should be offering the same maternity benefits to the people out of uniform that are supporting the ones in uniform, along with any other working mother, regardless of their place of employment. For my next child I am saving as much leave and sick time as possible and will be taking at least 6 weeks off to care for my baby, older children, and myself!

Sharon, Reston, VA

When my son was born, I was fortunate that my partner was making enough money that I could stay home. This turned out to be crucial to my son's health, as I was unable to pump enough breastmilk to be away for him for longer than a few hours. When my son weaned at 11 months, he proved to be allergic to both regular and hypoal-



lergenic formulas. I fear for what might have happened to his health if I had been unable to nurse him. Since I was able to stay home and nurse and bond with him, he has grown into a happy, healthy child.

Every mother should have the opportunity to stay home and nurse her child. Every parent should have the opportunity to stay home and bond with a new baby or adopted child without the stress of worrying about making ends meet or losing a job. Our children deserve no less than their parents' full attention when they are most needy and vulnerable. Paid family leave is an investment in the present and future health and happiness of our society – an investment that every American should be willing to make.

Heather, Arlington, VA

Women serve many purposes in the world and in life, one of which is to bring new life into the world. Companies need women to give birth so they can continue to have a workforce. The military needs women to give birth so they can continue to send soldiers to war. Not only should women have paid leave, they should be thanked and adored for bringing new life into the world so the world can keep going.

Jennifer, Burlington, VT

I am an American living in Montreal (Canada). I am a mother of two young children. I am blessed to live in a country where not only do mothers get paid time off, but so do fathers, when a baby is born. The parents can take up to a total of 70 weeks, 32 paid by the government. When my children were born, their father stayed home with us for a minimum of 8 weeks. I truly believe it changed the course of our lives with children.

With two adults to care for the infant, we were able to avoid be-

“Women serve many purposes in the world and in life, one of which is to bring new life into the world.”

Heather, Arlington, VA

coming over-tired and desperate. I was able to breastfeed both babies for the recommended time. When we had our second child, one of us was able to provide much needed attention to our oldest as well. Our babies developed a true, profound attachment to both of their parents allowing for both of us to spend quality time with them as they grew. As a mother, I have always been able to get the much-needed breaks, because our babies have a strong relationship with their father.

I believe our family is literally more healthy, both physically and emotionally, because of this brief time together. I cannot even imagine the chaotic situations families that do not have this time together endure. What a difficult way to start out in the world.

WASHINGTON

Amanda, Olympia, WA

For many women, the decision to have more (or any) children often times rests on their financial ability to care for them. For me, and for many mothers I know, giving birth doesn't just mean a new baby to care for. It means potential job loss and/or less financial ability to care for other children. We shouldn't have to choose between

feeding the family we have and carrying a new pregnancy to term. Please take action, do what is right, and support families! Our children depend on us to be successful later in life!

Martha, Shelton, WA

Three years ago my very good friend was terminal and so her son and daughter, daughter-in-law all took FMLA to help care for her the last few weeks of her life. Problem was that none of them had very much if any at all, of paid leave. So afterwards these families stayed not only with the pain of losing a loved one, but with the stress of trying to catch up with bills and not having the funds.

Today, they are still having a financial hardship, they still are having a very rough time financially. I know because my friend's son and daughter-in-law is my daughter. I see the pain and stress in their lives as they struggle to make ends meet. And now my son-in-law has also lost his job. If they would have had paid FMLA, at least it would have lessened the burden that they are still feeling.

Kathy, Seattle, WA

After the birth of my very much loved and planned for son, I became very ill. That was not how it was supposed to go – but that's how it went. I couldn't go back to work as soon as I had planned. However, I had to go back sooner than I was ready and, body and soul, I'm still paying for that. And so are you! I could have cost the healthcare system (and the government) a lot less if I'd been given the time to recover that I needed. Plus, we're now totally broke. It should NOT be this way.

Carrie, Seattle, WA

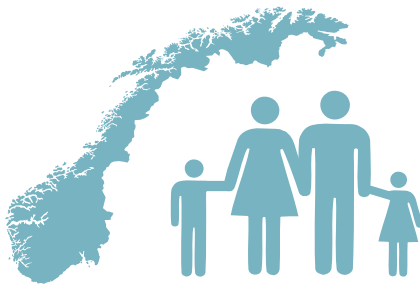
I am a third grade teacher. I was

shocked to find that a profession that is all about children doesn't provide any paid maternity leave. I was allowed to take six weeks for short-term disability (that I had to pay into). After that, I had to take the next two weeks for free. I am 'allowed' to take three months without losing my job. It was a hardship on my family, but I wasn't ready to leave my daughter at only six weeks old. My husband took two weeks unpaid completely.

I am lucky to have great health insurance from my job. I can't complain about that. New babies need love and care from both parents for at least two months, three would have been better. How can we be expected to go to work prepared, competent, and motivated when all new parents can think about is the health and safety of their new baby. They are also completely sleep-deprived. Employers would have more success if they treated their employees as people, worthy of respect and compassion. I believe that the workplace should not only provide paid adequate maternity and paternity leave, but also provide on-site child care. This would boost productivity and morale.

Shannon, Spokane, WA

I am currently pregnant with my second child. My husband is a full-time student/stay at home parent and I work. I will have leave with pay but only because I have saved my time over the past two years. When I get sick I come to work, when my child is sick I come to work, so that I will have paid time off with our second. I believe as the primary teachers and nurturers of our children it is critical that moms and dads both have time to recover and bond with their new family member. Our culture suffers greatly because families are constantly in survival mode. Instead of being able to focus on the importance of bonding and teaching we are burdened by having to worry about how to maintain our



IN NORWAY PARENTS CAN ASK FOR REDUCED HOURS AT WORK UNTIL THEIR CHILD IS 10 YEARS OLD

Hegewisch, A., & Gornick, J.C. (2008). Statutory routes to workplace flexibility in cross-national perspective.

basis needs.

Our culture has dismantled the idea of family, support and connection and it's the children that suffer the most from this mentality that parents have to do it all and do it alone. Please give to our future by nurture the need to have parents available to our children. Let parents play the part of parent and the child the part of child during the most critical time of ones life.

Betsy, Seattle, WA

I am fortunate in that I work for myself. I'm a lactation consultant and volunteer lactation support counselor with La Leche League, so I work professionally with hundreds of new families per year. It is imperative that new mothers have abundant time to get breastfeeding off to a good start, and have plenty of time to focus on connecting with their new babies.

Mothering is the most important career in the world. It is disgusting that the United States devalues mothering. It is very challenging for women to give their babies the best start in life when they must go back to work immediately.

I know from working with many families that it can take up to eight to twelve weeks for mothers and babies to settle in and get breastfeeding working great – just when mom has to go back to work. It's a shame.

Breastfeeding babies is vital to the health of our nation, and moms need the time to make it work.

Christa, Seattle, WA

I am self employed. I took 3 months off with the birth of each child. (We have 2 children.) I would have loved to take more. We paid the majority of our costs back within 1 year of each child, but we still have credit card debt that accumulated due to lost wages. Having paid maternity leave would have helped A LOT.

Lynne, Chehalis, WA

I became pregnant in 1975. I was the household breadwinner, since my spouse was attending college. When our daughter was born in 1976, I was allowed 8 weeks off, but they were unpaid. For the first two months of our daughter's life, we had to go on the USDA Food Stamps Program, because we had no income.

I was torn between developing the important maternal bonding process with breastfeeding and the need to return to work. It was extremely stressful. I would wish that no other woman ever go through this again.



Erika , Bainbridge Island, WA

I did not have paid family leave but thankfully had saved up 3-4 weeks of 'vacation' time and had saved enough to afford to be off work for 3 months. After 3 months I was able to start working a few hours a week, only because I had a dedicated and flexible employer. I also had a spouse working part time.

If I were a single mother I do not know what I would have done. In addition to paid family leave, mothers should be guaranteed their jobs back and employers should provide opportunities for mothers to pump breast milk. Thank you for caring about mothers – we all had one – and children – we all were one.

T, Seattle, WA

I did not have paid leave, I was fortunate to work for a company that gave me leave and maintained my health insurance for 3-months. Unpaid leave was only possible because of the financial security of knowing I had a job to go back to.

Without that security, my leave would have been much shorter and my stress much higher. Infant care is amazingly expensive. Knowing I was taking care of our girl, allowed my husband to focus on his work during that challenging sleep deprived transition. Being able to be home with my girl gave us all a strong foundation and bond from which she could fearlessly go to the arms of a care provider, knowing Mama and the mama's milk would come home again.

Angela, Seattle, WA

I didn't have fully paid maternity leave but my company paid me at 40% of my salary for 16 weeks. We staggered through the 16 weeks, both happy and exhaust-

ed. Having the time to bond with my son and experience my first parental successes and failures totally changed my expectations of how I planned to guide and nurture him going forward.

I could not imagine having to worry about no income when I was struggling to with sleep deprivation and the physical demands of recovery, breast feeding, and the needs of an infant. Maternity leave isn't a luxury and being able to take it shouldn't be either. It's a basic human right and societal need to have parents get off on a good foot with their children and a Child's right to be cared for by their mother for at least as long as it takes them to developmentally understand the new world outside the womb.

Jennifer, Olympia, WA

I had to get assistance from welfare when I went on maternity leave in November of 2010 – they gave me food assistance and required that I cash out my 401k to help my family make it until I went back to work... I am a professional and work for the state – I can't believe I had to take unpaid leave. I couldn't even afford to be gone longer than 8 weeks after the twins were born – I am the primary breadwinner in my family. What would a person do who doesn't have the same assets as me? It's a sad reflection on this country's 'family values' that we don't offer paid maternity leave.

Kerry, Wenatchee, WA

I had to leave the best job I ever had because of my new baby. I was working as a contractor for the federal government. There was no paid leave for maternity. They said they would hold my job for me for a month but with no child care available for newborns until 3 months old that wasn't more than my income, I had no choice but to resign.

This forced us to move back into my parent's house which was over 150 miles away. Meaning both of us had to quit our jobs and essentially start over. Financially, I have yet to recover. It's been 4.5 years now. I've got 3 part time jobs and still not working more than 20 hours a week and none of them are in the field in which I have training in.

Amanda, Auburn, WA

I am very lucky to be working in a supportive workplace. When I had my son 6 weeks early they were very flexible and gave me all the time I needed. I was able to take 2 1/2 months off to spend time in the NICU with my son then be at home while he grew stronger. The only problem was that I did not get paid for any of that time.

We went into debt due to hospital bills and my lost paychecks. We will be paying this off for awhile. The birth of my amazing baby boy has been a roadblock toward us potentially buying a house because of this debt. We will get there someday but the road keeps getting longer.

Rosa, Seattle, WA

I only had 1 month of vacation time accrued. So that meant I was only able to spend 1 month with my newborn because my family couldn't afford for me to do leave without pay. It still breaks my heart that I was unable to spend at least the first 3 months of her life with her. She was so small.

Kristina, Seattle, WA

I spent my twenties traveling around the world teaching English. I moved back to America to start a family, and after three years teaching English at the high school level, I became pregnant. I went to talk to HR about my maternity leave – I was

expecting a son in April and thought I would return in September. This was not to be. I was informed that, since I worked part-time, I did not qualify for FMLA. I also had only accrued 15 sick days. Which meant that I would receive the requisite six weeks off, with only three of those weeks 'paid' (they weren't really paid – they were days in which I was 'sick'). I tried to restrain my exclamations of horror – it wasn't the HR woman's fault after all – but I didn't know who else to talk to.

How was it possible that my friends in England and in parts of Asia were taking a full year off, and receiving pay? I tried complaining to my friends in America, and they mainly laughed and said, 'How did you NOT know this?' So I did the only thing I could do. I had George, and I took six weeks off. I received 15 days' 'sick leave' pay. At six weeks, I returned to work and was told, in no uncertain terms, that I would be fired if I did not return. My doctor DID NOT okay my return – my body was still healing. I was also breastfeeding, and had to pump in an unlocked book storage room where three times people walked in on me pumping. So embarrassing.

I have decided not to have a second child, and I quit teaching in order to have a more flexible schedule. The first three months of my son's life were, without a doubt, the hardest time of my life. Instead of enjoying my new baby and forming a bond with him, I cried through classes and suffered from several bouts of mastitis and yeast infections (because I could not pump whenever I wanted to – teachers only get a lunch break!). I am an educated, hard-working mom who feels deeply that this problem should no longer plague the nation.

Lucy, Woodinville, WA

I too have been very fortunate to have income enough for me departure from the work force while stay-

"The birth of my amazing baby boy has been a roadblock toward us potentially buying a house because of debt. We will get there someday but the road keeps getting longer."

Amanda, Auburn

ing at home with my first son. But now, I am mentoring a young woman who is stressed for income with a 9 month old son. She and the father of her child were couch surfing while she was pregnant due to loss of income. Then the father got a job as a maintenance worker on the graveyard shift. They now have a tiny one bedroom apt. which is in an affordable housing unit. She is alone all day with her baby but is determined to be a good mother and do all the right things for her son. But they are already worried about moving since their lease is up in three months. This mom could use some help from the policy makers here in King County. Who will watch her baby when she returns to work? Where can she receive quality childcare on their megar income? Please don't let her down.

Heidi, Vancouver, WA

I took three weeks off after Caesarian surgery when I gave birth to my son. Would I have liked more time to recover? Yes. Did I need more time with my newborn son who was suffering from jaundice and who was born a month early? Yes. That wasn't an option.

I was lucky to be able to have a job waiting for me thanks to the FMLA, but I couldn't afford more than three weeks, especially with the hospital bills waiting to be paid. I bought a breast pump second hand and pumped in the break room, carrying the milk back and forth with me. It was miserable, exhausting and heartbreaking, but I had no choice.

Jennifer, Seattle, WA

I was able to use my 5 weeks of sick leave for my maternity leave, but the rest was unpaid even though I was on bedrest prior to the birth of my first child and had a c-section which didn't allow me to drive or pick up my child for several weeks. We had to take out a loan to make ends meet. My husband had it worse, he was unable to take time off except for four days (one day a week for four weeks). Maternity and Paternity Leave should be a right, not a privilege.

Nancy, Vancouver, WA

I was an older mother who decided to adopt a newborn. I had been working in the same Oregon school district for almost twenty years and had many weeks worth of sick leave to use. My adoption took place close to the summer months which enabled me to use those months without missing work days. However, many women and teachers are not so fortunate. They haven't accrued enough sick days to use and end up having to take unpaid leave to have or adopt a baby. Even with the sick leave I had saved, I worried the whole year that something would happen and I might not have enough sick leave to cover missed work days.

Adoption poses a different problem. Since I was adopting a baby out of state, I had to spend



hours trying to keep the paperwork in motion while my baby sat in foster care. I had to use all my sick leave to take care of that business as well as the time it took to travel out of state to get the baby. I was so worried about the impact that foster care had on my baby, along with worrying about how many sick days I had left. It is crucial that a mother spend time with an adopted baby as much as possible to form a lasting bond.

A paid family leave would have taken an already huge burden off my shoulders. I would then be able to feel at ease about having sick days to use. I believe the time has come for our country to realize that the most important time for a baby is from birth to age 5. Paid family leave will benefit all American families in the long run. The sooner the better!

Valerie, Seattle, WA

I was fortunate that I had the support of my husband's wages when I had my daughter in 1992. I went into premature labor almost 2 months before the due date. My doctor prescribed bed rest until the due date, so I was off work for two months before my daughter's birth and for four weeks after her birth. My vacation time was not that extensive, so there were a few weeks of unpaid leave.

Not every woman is fortunate to have a well-employed partner when they are planning a birth of a child. Not every woman works for a hospital when she gives birth. I was one of the few fortunate women who had an employed partner and who worked for a hospital, where I gave birth to my healthy baby girl.

Becky, Sammamish, WA

I was working for a non-profit when I had my first son. My mom had been a stay-at-home mom and I really wanted to stay home

AS OF JANUARY 1, 2013 FINLAND IS OFFERING DADS UP TO 9 WEEKS OF PAID PATERNITY LEAVE

<http://www.kela.fi/ininternet/english.nsf/NETI201212145301HL?OpenDocument>



as long as possible with my child before going back to work. My work was really great and with the help of sick day donations from co-workers, I was able to take off close to 10 weeks paid. We also received a financial gift from a family member that enabled me to stay home a bit longer.

I stayed home a total of 16 weeks with my baby. I felt that 8 weeks would not have been enough at all and is ludicrous as a society to expect babies and mothers be separated after only 6-8 weeks! No matter how good the childcare may be, I think that there is NO substitute for the bond and relationship that develops from having a loving parent stay with the child for at least the first year of life. I was lucky that after returning to work, my husband who works graveyard and my mother were able to juggle childcare responsibilities while I was gone.

Many other countries recognize the importance of early childhood development and it is represented in their laws regarding maternity AND paternity leave. Why can't we? Are we that profit driven of a society that our most important national product, our children, must be compromised? I find it very short sighted and a great injustice that only the middle to upper class who can live off of one income for a period of time, or have generational wealth to rely upon in affording high quality childcare, are the only ones able to offer this

basic human need to their children. How is that fair to all children and why is such a 'family centric' culture as our own so behind others on this issue?

Robin, Seattle, WA

I work for a small international non-profit, mostly based in Europe. Their policy for maternity leave was that 'they will meet whatever the laws of the country of residence of their employee is.' We only have 4 employees in the USA, so when I told them that according to US law I wasn't entitled to any maternity leave they were shocked! Luckily, thanks to the FMLA, I was able to say that for companies with 50 or more employees we were entitled to 3 months unpaid leave. They still recognized that this was unacceptable, and I was able to negotiate for 3 months of paid leave. Thank goodness!

My husband, who works for the University of Washington, is also taking advantage of his 3 months unpaid leave from the FMLA so that we don't need to put our baby into daycare until he is 6 months old. This is a huge help because our little one has been battling a bad staph infection since he was 6 weeks old, and requires 3 soaks in the bath a day – which a day care could never provide. I truly believe that parental leave is not just a 'benefit' for the parents, but is actually a Children's Health issue, and should be viewed that way!

Kristin, Seattle, WA

I'm being considered for a job, though I am five months pregnant, which means that I do not/will not have access even to unpaid FMLA. I am interested in the job though sacrificing my baby's first few months is not something I want to do. My family is mid-bankruptcy and needs money though and I seem to be getting better job application responses than my husband.

With my last baby and at my last day job almost two years ago I was laid off at eight months pregnant meaning I had no paid leave either, though I would have had I not been laid off. So now I am deciding whether or not to take/apply for jobs or stay with baby and volunteer a lot while losing our house and more.

Lois, Tacoma, WA

In 1999 I was diagnosed with colon cancer. Over the next year I had surgery, radiation and chemotherapy. My boss would have fired me but for the FML act. I was able to gradually return to work and was an asset for the company for eight more years. My daughter and her husband were able to take necessary time off, knowing her job was secure, to take care of me and when her three children have had health problems.

Diana, Springdale, WA

In the course of my life I have known literally dozens of parents who suffered from lack of paid family leave. The lack is especially hard on people who are just starting out, have children who are disabled, or don't have the training and education to obtain a job where they are not considered a 'disposable employee.'

I believe that every child deserves a good start. By definition, that includes having parents who have the time and energy to bond

“Many other countries recognize the importance of early childhood development and it is represented in their laws regarding maternity AND paternity leave. Why can't we?”

Becky, Sammamish, WA

and care for them from birth, a mother who has a reasonable opportunity and lots of support to breastfeed for six or more months, and a family that is not asked to choose between the need to care for a newborn and the need to pay the rent. The long term economic value of supporting families when they are at their most vulnerable and fostering bonds between parents and children is indisputable. This is a no-brainer, folks. Hearts and pocketbooks are in agreement here.

Carrie, Seattle, WA

My employer was unable to provide me with paid family leave after the birth of my son in March 2010. I cobbled together a patchwork of vacation and sick days to stay home with my baby. In addition, I took 2 months off unpaid and my husband and I struggled to meet our monthly expenses. It had taken us about a year before our baby was born to save up so that we could just barely afford for me to take an unpaid maternity leave.

I hope to have another baby in the future and I just don't know how we'll be able to save enough.

Katie, Seattle, WA

My first six weeks off with my son were invaluable. I was lucky enough to get 6 weeks but we couldn't have done it without my insurance. With my 2nd son I was in England and had six months off which was heaven. I got to bond with him before jumping into a crazy life of 2 kids under 4 and working full time.

Lisa, Bellingham, WA

Our family was very lucky in that I had accrued many days of sick leave that I could use to stay home with my baby. Had that not been the case I would have tried to take a leave of absence as I think it is of utmost importance that a mom spends those critical first few months with her baby. It worked so well for our family that I was able to extend my leave and spend the first two years home, and come back to my job. The only downfall is that I lost seniority and in this job climate every year I worry. In the long run, even if I lost my job, our family would not trade what/how we did it. I wish every parent had the ability to make these same choices.

Jeanette, Everett, WA

Paid family leave is important to the health and well-being of every American child. A society that does not value it's children enough to allow mothers to give the best possible care to a newborn is a society that has it's priorities completely askew. I was fortunate in that I had opted to pay for disability insurance through my work that covered maternity leave. I only



received \$300 a week which was a fraction of what I was making at my job. It did help, but it really fell short of what I would have hoped to receive.

Ultimately, I quit my job to stay home with my baby. I was lucky to have that choice. I made that choice because I believed it was more important to have my child breastfed and cared for by his mother. It is absolutely insulting to American mothers not to be given adequate time and financial security to take care of the next generation of American citizens!

Samantha, Seattle, WA

When I called my employer about maternity leave, I was told that only professional staff, (people making 6 figures or more) qualified for paid leave. I thought it was incredibly unfair that I worked for the same company, but because I was a simple accounting clerk I did not 'deserve' company paid maternity leave. I was lucky to have my sick leave available to me.

When I found myself having post delivery complications and needed more than the 6 weeks that my sick leave would pay, others in my office offered to donate leave to me. However, when I called to ask if this was allowed, I was told that donated leave can only be used in the event of an accident. Like, if someone was skiing and they fell and broke their leg.

I thought this was backwards thinking. I was bringing a baby into the world, but she was less important to my employer than someone who was in a thoughtless accident. That's how I saw it. I had to take the additional leave without pay. this put a serious strain on our house hold.

Cathy, Spokane, WA,

When I had my 3 children in 1974, 1976 & 1978, I was a Washing-

ton State employee and had option of using all my sick leave and then adding as much unpaid leave as I desired.

Thus I took 6 months with two and then 16 months with the 3rd and had a great year with all 3... I thought it was so wonderful that 'maternity' leave in the US was finally catching up with Europe... and now I find that my own children NO LONGER have these options! Let's all get on board for sane family leave in order to have healthy children and parents, and more productive employees! It is a win win for employers and employees.

Molly, Mill Creek, WA

When I was 20 years old, I was un-married, pregnant, and working a full-time job as a shoe salesperson. When I asked my manager how long I would be allowed to take leave, he told me one month. Unpaid. I didn't know any better, and I desperately needed to keep my job, so I went back to work and put my one-month-old baby in daycare. Later, my boss admitted that he had LIED about how much leave I had, because he wanted me to come back sooner.

My first child only breastfed exclusively for the first month, and then had to start supplementing with formula. By 5 months, she was completely uninterested in breastfeeding. I would ask that you make paid family leave the norm in our country, rather than the exception, so that no new mother will ever again have to leave her one-month-old baby in daycare so she can work.

Amanda, Olympia, WA

When my first child was born in California in 2006, I was blessed enough to have been working for a large company with over 50 employees, and qualified for the FMLA and 14 weeks of paid maternity leave (8 weeks of recovery from the cesar-

ean and 6 weeks of bonding time). This paid leave was essential to our family: it helped me take care of my body and heal after major surgery, and prevented me from losing my job and subsequently my livelihood! In Washington I gave birth to my second child in 2009, while working for a small business with under ten employees.

My employer promised that I would have a job to come back to, but then when I was ready to come back to work changed his tune. He said that they had changed their mind and couldn't afford to take me back or have me work from home. I lost my job, and ended up taking out \$10,000 extra in student loans that year just to make ends meet. Paid family leave is ubiquitous in every other industrialized country; why can't the United States see that caring for families, and ultimately its children, will care for the future generations?

WEST VIRGINIA

Tammy, Grafton, WV

After my first child was born I had to return to work in 4 weeks as that was all the paid time that I had accumulated at my job. I was trying to breastfeed and unable to pump at work and how I did not develop mastitis amazes me now. In other developed countries in Europe moms are given paid maternity leave of sometimes up to a year after a birth. They are paid to stay at home and care for their babies which allows them to breast-feed their babies unhindered.

Being a former working mother I know firsthand how hard it is to try and maintain your milk supply when working. Another point no need for fancy day care centers in those countries as moms are caring for their own infants in their own homes. What a cost savings, and

moms are not stressed out from having to work, trying to maintain their family unit and care for young children.

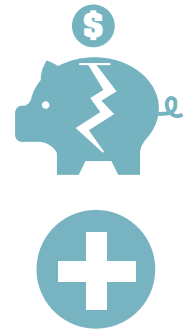
I bet the level of postpartum depression in moms is lower also, and their breastfeeding rates are anywhere from 80-90 percent. Breastfeeding is such a benefit to moms and babies and research is finding more and more benefits all the time. It is so important the Kora mandates moms to nurse babies for two years. I learned long ago in nursing school, mother the mother so she can mother the new baby. Our moms are told return to work in 6 weeks and to bad your stressed out,that's life.

Ann, Washington, WV

I am the breadwinner for my family. When I learned I was pregnant, I was grateful to know I would not lose my job and have 6 weeks paid maternity leave. The men and women in Congress need to realize that my situation is not typical. Most of the women supporting their families with their unpaid labor in the home and underpaid labor outside the home get no paid maternity leave. Compared to other industrialized nations, the US is way behind on the compassionate legislation guaranteeing women's jobs and pay will continue as our families grow.

I hear men in meetings every week say, 'It's motherhood and apple pie'. From where I stand motherhood is not a truly valued calling. Instead it's a reason to drop women from equal pay, professional progression, and even basic employment rolls. It's time for the US to join this century and recognize women's worth – as workers and mothers. This is the kind of pro-woman and pro-life legislation Congress should work on. NOT wedge issues to whip up the hater base. Show you care – if you dare!

IN 2001, 25 PERCENT OF DUAL-INCOME COUPLES WHO FILED FOR BANKRUPTCY DID SO AFTER MISSING 2+ WEEKS OF WORK DUE TO ILLNESS OR THE ILLNESS OF A FAMILY MEMBER



Elizabeth Warren and Amelia Warren Tyagi, The Two-Income Trap: Why Middle-Class Mothers and Fathers Are Going Broke (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

WISCONSIN

Elizabeth, Fredonia, WI

I am a social worker and earning a post-master's certificate in Infant Mental Health. Endless research has proven that developing a strong and secure attachment between an infant and primary caregiver(s) is a monumental prevention for many social issues. These children are able to become more productive citizens that can more appropriately function in their family, school and community. They experience less mental health concerns, have less aggressive behaviors, etc. Being able to strengthen the bond between a parent and their child is such an important step in preventing other social ills that our government often pays for. We can not afford to not allow parents to be the primary source of how children learn trusting relationships, social skills, and emotional stability.

Amy, Appleton, WI

I am the proud mother of a five month old daughter. I was one of the lucky few who was able to take 12 weeks of maternity leave and still make ends meet. It took a lot of planning and saving, and was very

hard to make happen as my husband was in the process of closing his business. He was able to collect unemployment while he searched for a job, but that was not nearly what he would be making in an actual job. While it may seem that taking 12 weeks of time was not a responsible decision under these circumstances, we as a family deemed it necessary for our child. We needed that time to bond with our baby, to spend that time learning how to care for our baby, learning to decipher the needs and the schedule and the personality of our baby. We had to make many sacrifices, and we still do.

It is now two months later, and we are still trying to get back to the same place financially that we were before the leave. And this is with my husband now employed and receiving regular pay. We are still sacrificing, and trying to scrounge together a savings, and still trying to get the medical bills paid off. With paid leave, the situation would have been much less dire and much more enjoyable. I can't imagine the benefit this would have for families across the nation, and for the growth-well-being-and emotions of our children, if all parents were able to take this crucial time to bond with their child. I find it unbelievable, that this, the



United States, the Free Nation, is one of the very few countries in the world to not offer paid family leave! We are suppose to be setting the example for the world, yet here we are behind the times. Third world countries offer better to their people than we do for our own.

Jennifer, Milwaukee, WI

I am writing both as a mother and as a community counselor who has advocated for children and families for over 20 years. As a mother I was fortunate to have the choice to stay home while my children were babies. Still it was tough financially, we lived check to check and I ended up babysitting neighbors children in my home to bring in some extra money. If not for Title 19 my kids would not have been insured as my partners employer did not offer affordable insurance. My children were sick less often than kids in daycare and people have always remarked on their problem solving skills, communication skills and basic secure sense of self.

As a counselor and advocate, I encourage you to research the myriad studies that speak to the benefits of forming a secure parent child attachment in the early years. Without this attachment, children are more likely to have difficulty with interpersonal relationships and other behavioral problems. When we look at the sad state of many youth in our country one must question the link. Policy makers tend to overlook this 'big picture' view, but we as a society can no longer afford to do so. Finally it is shameful that we as one of the wealthiest, most 'developed' nations care so little for our children and families and provide so few services in comparison to other developed nations. It is time to step up to the plate.

Theresa, Madison, WI

I did have 'paid' family leave only because I used my paid vacation time, not because my em-

“When driving to work those first three months, I would slap myself awake many times during my morning commute. I envied those mothers who had the luxury of staying home with their babies...”

Sarah, Milwaukee, WI

ployer at the time, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, offered any paid leave when my son was born.

I currently live in Montreal, Canada, and admire how thoughtful, sensible, and reasonable are the family policies in this country, particularly the fact that jobs are secured and maintained so that fathers and mothers can stay – a full-year at home – after the birth of a child. It pains me that the USA, as a society, does provide the needed resources (e.g., family time, job security, early education, etc.) for families to nurture and care for their young, particularly in their early years. This must change.

Sarah, Milwaukee, WI

I had gotten a temp job when I was pregnant, because I knew what my husband was earning at the time wouldn't be enough to support the 3 of us – him, myself, and baby. After working a few months, I learned that my employer would probably hire me full time! But it so happened that the temp status ended near the birth of my baby and that the fulltime position HAD to start on a

fixed day – January 7th. I planned to start full time after spending some unpaid time off with my new baby. Of course, just starting as full time, I was not eligible for any sort of paid leave. And I had to start work, to be present on the start date, to ensure I would keep the full time position.

My husband's job had ended before the baby came, so I needed to have this job to support all three of us. January 7th, my full-time start date, worked out to be only 4 weeks after the birth of my baby. As any doctor can tell you, that's 2 weeks short of the standard 6-week recovery period! (Because I was working, my recovery period took 8 weeks.) During those first four months, I was breastfeeding my baby, waking up 2 times or more each night, staying up sometimes an hour each time until my baby fell back asleep. I went to work (full time) in the morning, pumped at work, while my husband took care of her at home.

When driving to work those first three months I would slap myself awake many times during my morning commute. I envied those mothers who had the luxury of staying home with their babies, getting to sleep when their babies slept, and not having to mess around with pumping like I did. It's so much easier just to bypass the pumping and be able to breastfeed your baby.

So, a more ideal solution would have been to be eligible for some sort of leave from day one of starting my new full time position. On the other hand, I wonder if that were the case, my employer would have either just pushed my start date to 3 months after my baby's birth. More likely, they would have hired someone else, had I have refused to start January 7th. It was a rough time. My scenario seemed to have fallen into a loophole.

Ann, Madison, WI

I had my baby at the start of summer, an ideal time. And, luckily both my husband and I have jobs that offered us paid leave. This was an incredible support for us. I am an older mom who had to have a C-section (despite extensive preparation for a mid-wife assisted birth!).

As an older mom my body was certainly slower to bounce back from major abdominal surgery. It made a tremendous difference to my health that I have time to fully heal before returning to work. And, it made a big difference that my husband was also able to be home, take care of the baby part of the each day so that I could fully rest, and do all of the heavier household duties – such as grocery shopping and laundry. All families could benefit from more support in the early weeks/months of life!

Diane, Madison, WI

Many people outside of academics think we have it easy, that female professors have flexible schedules that make balancing work and family a breeze. In fact this is not the case. Women faculty members often have to choose between having a family at all and pursuing their career path. It is very common to find female faculty with no or only one child – choices they made during the pursuit of tenure.

In addition, faculty members who adopt or give birth while on the tenure clock must negotiate individually with their department/college and university for any accommodations. There are not standard policies or packages, which leaves women often at the mercy of a department chair or administrator. Enough! Let's get a basic care requirement in place to give transparency and blanket coverage across occupations to this vital need.

Amy, Platteville, WI

I was able to stay home after having my first and second child for 3 months. I wish every mom had the luxury to stay home for at least 6 months. I couldn't imagine going back to work after 6 weeks, and realize that this is probably the reason so many moms stop breast feeding early.

Breast feeding takes time and patience, and it often means your baby isn't sleeping through the night until 4 or 6 months or more. Having moms go back to work earlier than six months means they're more likely to use formula to feed their babies, whereas if they had more time (and paid leave), moms and babies could be in a better routine, rely less on formula (which is expensive) and moms would be alert and ready to return to the work force.

Kelly, Madison, WI

I worked in the restaurant industry and did not have a paid leave. I had been at my place of work full time for eleven years. I tried to go back to work part time after a month but I wasn't able to do so and continue to breastfeed. I tried for four more months and eventually had to quit my job.

The combination of not having a private place to pump and not having any paid time off helped make my decision. Breastfeeding and my babies health was my number one priority. Now, my husband works two jobs and barely sees our baby. The restaurant/bar industry relies on honest, loyal employees, but they make it hard to be one and a working mom.

Ted, Kenosha, WI

I'm a proud father of three very attractive, brilliant kids. When each of my kids were born, I used my vacation time to be home with my wife and the new baby for the

first week. I did not consider using FMLA, because our family could not have afforded the unpaid time off. However, it would have been beneficial to our family if I had been able to take more time off than only a week after each birth.

William, Fond Du Lac, WI

It was way back in 1981. We had no such help. After she was born her so called mother just ran off. As I had no family at the time in North Carolina, I had to hire my next door neighbor to watch her while I worked. She was not a sick child. I love her and raising her for 11 years as a single father is one thing I am proud of.

She turned out good. An 'A' student. It was also a trying time back then for all single fathers as we were few and far between. It just was not really heard of then so a law like this would have been so helpful. Glad it is there now to help all families and parents whether they be a two-parent family or a single dad or mom raising their child/children.

Salena, Bayfield, WI

This is going to be our last baby. I'm going to take all the time I need with her...That is what I told my partner when it was getting closer to our due date. The two children before Stella I was back to work ASAP after their birth. No time to take off was what I was told. And taking off time, that, I could not afford. UNFAIR. I was bummed that I wasn't able to be with my brand new baby for the amount of time that we all really needed. I was breastfeeding and 6 weeks or less just wasn't exactly fitting our needs.

Stella, our fourth child, a beautiful, healthy baby girl was born in the comfort of our home. A



perfect well planned homebirth. I was working for a clinic on my reservation and was absolutely delighted when the human resources manager told me that I would get 6 weeks of PAID leave and that I might also be eligible for an additional 3 months with 60% of my wages covered. Done. Sign me up. I was a little bummed out that my wages weren't fully covered but all I thought was 'at least it's something'.

It is important for us life-giving woman to be given the time needed when they are first born to nourish, take care of, and love these small helpless babies. We deserve to do it with FULL PAY from our employers. Why settle for anything less?

Erin, Trevor, WI

When I had my son, I received 6 weeks of un-paid leave. I was alone throughout my pregnancy and had planned to go through with an adoption. I told my family about a week after my son's birth and was offered a place to live and raise my son. By the time he actually came home, I had a little more than 3 weeks of quality one on one time. This was not nearly enough to get back into a schedule with him. Not to mention the bills were piling up.

Mothers and families deserve the time off to care for their children. The first few weeks are so important for both the newborn and the parents. How can the United States be so far behind on this? The discrimination against mothers and families in the workforce HAS to come to an end!

Sherri, Madison, WI

When my second child was born, my husband had saved up vacation time to take some time off to help out at home and get to know his new daughter. Instead, things got busy at work and his company re-



IN THE UNITED STATES
ONLY 11%
OF PRIVATE SECTOR
WORKERS RECEIVE
PAID LEAVE

Center for Women and Work, Rutgers, "Policy Matters: Public Policy, Paid Leave for New Parents, and Economic Security for U.S. Workers," April 2012

quired him to work overtime. I had postpartum depression and this made for a very difficult situation for both of us. He had hoped the company was family-friendly, but it turned out they could not be flexible when he needed to be home the most. This was a major factor in his looking for a different job, and he found one and switched a couple years later. I'm sure it seemed good to the company in the short-term, but it turned out bad for them in the long-term.

Stacy, Green Bay, WI

While my employer didn't offer a paid maternity leave, I did have short term disability insurance, that I paid for, which provided partial pay for only 6 weeks after my son was born via an un-planned c-section. I used a combination of vacation and sick days to cover the cost of our health insurance premiums for the total of 12 weeks I was off on leave. It was

very tight financially, but with our savings we were able to get by. My husband was only able to take off 2 weeks – the first week our son was born, and the first week I went back to work; both were unpaid. We both thought it was important to stay home as long as possible with the baby, both so that we could establish a breastfeeding routine and to bond with the baby.

Because of my 12 weeks of leave, we established a wonderful breastfeeding routine and we were able to continue it until just after his first birthday. I credit my maternity leave for this. If I hadn't had 3 months to practice both nursing and pumping, I doubt we would have been able to continue it for so long. Today he is a bright, happy, and well-adjusted 4 year old. We are hoping to have another child soon, and one of my major concerns is maternity leave. It is possible I may change employers soon to further my career, and that would make me ineligible for leave under my state's current FMLA regulations or be eligible for most employer's short term disability insurance, both of which require a year of employment for benefits to be used.

At this time, we simply can not afford a 12 week unpaid leave, and I feel a shorter leave would hinder the establishment of a breastfeeding routine and of bonding with the baby. Of course, this uncertainty regarding my employment and maternity leave status is placing a hold on our family plans. If I were able to have a paid maternity leave; even if it was at a reduced pay, this would greatly ease our decision to expand our family.

My husband and I are both college-educated professionals, and it's disheartening to realize that even though we have minimal amount of 'good' debt, manage our money wisely, and are honest hard working citizens, we are unable to financially afford another child at this point due to lack of paid maternity leave.

MomsRising.org is a multicultural, non-partisan, online and on-the-ground grassroots organization of more than a million people who are working to achieve economic security for all families in the United States. MomsRising listens to our constituency and focuses advocacy where we can most quickly improve family economic security, including advocating for affordable, quality early care and education, paid family leave, flexible work options and for an end to the wage and hiring discrimination which penalizes so many mothers. MomsRising also advocates for healthcare for all, toxic-free environments, and breastfeeding rights so that all children can have a healthy start.

MomsRising.org