Prevent Child Abuse America®
Centering families through every turn.

Paid Family and Medical Leave is Important to All Families

Paid Leave Strengthens Families, Protects Children, and Builds Healthier Communities

The federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) offers job protection during family or medical leave, but only about 56% of U.S. workers are eligible.[1] The law excludes many low-income, part-time, and small-firm workers due to its 50-employee firm size and tenure requirements. Even among those covered, FMLA is unpaid, making it unworkable for families living paycheck to paycheck.

Just 27% of U.S. workers have access to paid family leave through their employer.[2] Among the lowest-paid 10%, that number drops to only 5-6%.[3] This means that for most working families, especially in underserved communities, the decision to take leave can lead to job loss, food insecurity, or poverty.

> **"...states have the power to expand on FMLA by creating more inclusive policies, including broader eligibility criteria, establishing paid leave programs, and offering stronger job protections to ensure that more workers can take leave when they need it."**

Fortunately, federal law sets only a minimum standard: individual states have the power to expand on FMLA by creating more inclusive policies, including broader eligibility criteria, establishing paid leave programs, and offering stronger job protections to ensure that more workers can take leave when they need it. By building on the federal foundation, states can craft solutions that better reflect the realities of their residents and strengthen the economic stability and health of families across all communities. But while state-level progress is promising, it remains uneven, and millions of workers still fall through the cracks.

A Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program that provides meaningful wage replacement and universal access would strengthen families, protect children, and build healthier communities. Without this support, families are forced into impossible choices between their financial stability and the health, safety, or emotional well-being of loved ones.

Absent a federal PFML policy, several states have taken the lead to implement statewide policies. These states are experiencing outcomes like improved family health, a stronger workforce, and reduced poverty.

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1 https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/key-facts-the-family-and-medical-leave-act.pdf

2 https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ebs2.t06.htm

3 Id.

PFML Supports Infant Health and Secure Attachment

The first year of life is foundational for healthy brain development and emotional regulation. Without paid leave, many parents – especially in rural areas or those with limited early childhood services – must return to work too soon.[4]

PFML ensures:

- Time for parental bonding and secure attachment;[5]
- Reduced maternal depression and stress;[6] and,
- Stronger, more consistent caregiving relationships.[7]

These early conditions are critical for long-term child development and family well-being.

PFML Creates a Stronger Workforce

Well-designed paid family and medical leave isn't just a family benefit: it's a workforce strategy.

PFML allows employers to:

- **Reduce turnover and boost morale and productivity.** Recent state-level evaluations find PFML has no negative employer impacts and is associated with higher employee commitment and easier absence management. Evidence from New York's and DC's PFML employer surveys shows neutral-to-positive effects on performance, retention, and morale.[8]
- **Strengthen labor-force attachment for caregivers.** PFML improves economic security during leave and can increase caregivers' attachment to the labor market afterward.[9]
- **Support recruitment and talent competitiveness.** Employers gain access to a wider talent pool and a benefit that workers value.
- **Encourage shared caregiving that stabilizes teams.** With PFML, more fathers and non-birth parents take bonding leave. For example, New Jersey has seen male bonding claims double since 2016, helping families balance care without exiting jobs.[10]

4 https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/154/5/e2024068958/199722/Paid-Family-and-Medical-Leave-Policy-Statement

5 Id.

6 https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667%2822%2900311-5/

7 https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/DC-Paid-Family-Leave-report-2025.pdf

8 https://business.columbia.edu/sites/default/files-efs/citation_file_upload/The%20impact%20of%20paid%20family%20leave%20on%20employers%20evidence%20from%20New%20York%281%29.pdf; https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/DC-Paid-Family-Leave-report-2025.pdf

9 https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w33918/w33918.pdf

10 https://www.nj.gov/labor/lwdhome/press/2023/20231017_survey.shtml

PFML is Prevention by Strengthening Families

Paid Family and Medical Leave isn't just about jobs – it's a pro-family, pro-health, and pro-worker policy that strengthens early development, economic security, opportunity, and community resilience. It also helps protect children from neglect and instability: multi-state research links PFML to lower infant maltreatment by reducing perinatal risk factors—stabilizing family income, lowering caregiver stress, and increasing non-birth-parent involvement.[11]

When inclusive and broadly accessible, PFML enhances protective factors against maltreatment by:

- **Improving investments in early health.** States with PFML show higher breastfeeding initiation and exclusivity, and PFML is associated with increased parental investments in infant health.[12]
- **Supporting maternal mental health and recovery.** PFML is connected to lower stress and better postpartum mental health, especially when leave is paid and long enough to cover birth recovery.[13]
- **Ensuring stable caregiving and adult supervision.**
- **Strengthening family economic security during crises.** An evaluation of DC's PFML finds workers use leave to stabilize finances and caregiving, supporting well-being and job retention.[14]
- **Reducing poverty gaps** when programs are designed inclusively. Evidence indicates that PFML programs that center equity and inclusion (clear eligibility, outreach, language access) reach more workers in under-resourced, rural, and tribal communities.[15]

11 https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9843119/

12 https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11128124/

13 https://policycentermmh.org/the-interconnection-of-paid-family-and-medical-leave-and-maternal-mental-health/

14 https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/DC-Paid-Family-Leave-report-2025.pdf

15 https://nationalpartnership.org/news_post/new-study-state-paid-leave-programs-becoming-more-equitable-reaching-more-workers/

Comprehensive Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) Policy that Supports All Workers

To best meet the needs of today's working families, a state's PFML must:

- **Expand eligibility** to include part-time, gig, seasonal, and self-employed workers. New Hampshire operates a voluntary PFML model with both employer and individual opt-in when an employer doesn't participate. It provides 60% wage replacement for up to 6 weeks, covers bonding, family care, and qualifying military exigencies, and the individual plan has a one-time 7-month waiting period before benefits begin.[16]
- **Provide comprehensive qualifying reasons** ("what's covered") to include bonding with a new child; care for a family member's serious health condition; an employee's own serious health condition; pregnancy-related needs with extra weeks for complications; "safe leave" for survivors of domestic/sexual violence and stalking; and military family caregiving and qualifying exigencies.[17]
- **Provide progressive wage replacement**. States show it's possible to ensure low- and moderate-income workers can actually afford to take leave. In five states, workers are paid a flat percentage of their average weekly wages ranging from 70% to 85%, depending on the state.[18]
- **Cover employees of small businesses** to ensure that employees at small firms have the same access to benefits and job protection as others. In Oregon, for example, job protection is provided to all employers after 90 days – regardless of size.[19] And while most state programs use shared payroll contributions split between employers and employees to fund paid leave for small businesses, some states have opted for alternative funding approaches. Washington offers small-business assistance grants up to $3,000 per employee on leave to cover temporary replacements/overhead costs.[20] In Virginia and Florida, laws enable employers (including small firms) to purchase private paid family leave insurance products.[21]
- **Include strong job protections** or expanded job protections as a number of states have in place including Colorado's policy (180+ days of tenure by current employer).[22]
- **Fund outreach and education,** as Minnesota does, earmarking 0.5% of benefits for public education and support services.[23]
- **Recognize diverse and extended family structures,** including nontraditional family, to reflect caregiving realities.[24]
- **Respect tribal sovereignty and ensure culturally responsive implementation** for American Indian and Alaska Native communities.[25] Many tribal employees are excluded from FMLA, and most state PFML programs cannot mandate tribal participation.[26]

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16 https://www.nfp.com/insights/nh-pfml-website-launched/

17 https://paidleave.oregon.gov/resources/common-questions.html; https://paidleave.wa.gov/find-out-how-paid-leave-works/; https://paidleave.oregon.gov/employees/applying-for-safe-leave.html

18 https://pn3policy.org/pn-3-state-policy-roadmap-2025/us/paid-family-medical-leave

19 https://paidleave.oregon.gov/resources/common-questions.html

20 https://paidleave.wa.gov/small-businesses/

21 https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title38.2/chapter1/section38.2-107.2/; https://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&Search_String=&URL=0600-0699%2F0624%2FSections%2F0624.6086.html&utm_

22 https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/state-paid-family-leave-laws-across-the-u-s/

23 https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2023/0/Session%2BLaw/Chapter/59

24 https://www.clasp.org/issues/education-labor-worker-justice/job-quality-and-work-life/paid-family-and-medical-leave/

25 https://www.washington.edu/populationhealth/2023/05/18/pilot-project-explores-equitable-access-to-states-paid-family-leave-policy-for-aian-families/

26 https://ctmirror.org/2024/05/02/ct-lawmakers-extend-paid-leave-benefits-to-employees-of-tribes/