

Maternity Leave Policy in the United States

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WHAT IS PAID MATERNITY LEAVE?

Paid maternity leave allows workers a certain amount of time off while still receiving pay and benefits

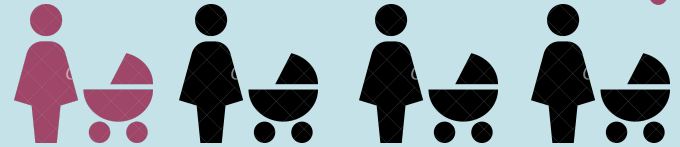
Paid maternity leave policies are designed to:

- Provide time off from work so that new mothers can prepare for and recover from childbirth
- Allow mothers to care for and bond with their newborn or newly adopted children

More than **1 in 5** women in the top quartile of income get paid leave, compared to only **1 in 20** women in the bottom quartile.¹

CURRENT US POLICY

There is no universal policy for paid leave in the United States, so the length of maternity leave varies greatly state-to-state and even across industries and individual jobs.² In certain states-- California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Puerto Rico, mothers receive at least partial wage replacement while on leave related to pregnancy or childbirth. However, only Rhode Island requires the employer to provide the same or equivalent job after the period of leave.³



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of women return to work less than two weeks after giving birth.¹

DISPARITIES IN THE US

- Only 13% of American workers have access to paid family leave through their employers.⁴
- 93 percent of low-wage workers have no access to paid family leave.⁵
- Hispanic women are less likely to take maternity leave compared with non-Hispanic White and Black women
- 60% of women with post-bachelor education received paid maternity leave compared to 29% with high school or less.⁶
- Almost half of privately insured women compared with 16% of women covered by Medicaid/out-of-pocket received paid maternity leave.⁶

POLICY EXAMPLES ABROAD

Out of 41 nations, the United States is the only country that does not provide any paid leave.¹ Other nations offer at least a few weeks of leave, with France and Spain offering mothers over 300 weeks of leave, although less than 10% of the leave is paid. Greece and Japan, on the other hand, offer couples more than 60 weeks of protected job leave, with around 50% being paid.³

Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)



The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 dictates the policy surrounding family leave in the United States. It allows employees of covered employers to take unpaid, though protected, leave for specified family and medical reasons with continuation of health insurance.⁷ However, there is no guaranteed paid leave through the FMLA. Additionally, to qualify, the individual must have worked for the same employer for 1,250 hours during the 12 months prior to the leave.⁸

PROPOSED POLICY SOLUTIONS

1

Universal Paid Leave Policy

A universal paid leave policy will allow all mothers to have access to the policy, in contrast to the 13% that currently have access to paid family leave.⁴ To experience the full benefits of paid maternity leave, the policy should guarantee the same or equitable job when the mother returns and be paid.⁸

2

Governmentally Sourced Paid Leave

Currently, California offers governmentally sourced paid family leave through the Paid Family Leave (CA-PFL) program. California has seen increases in mothers taking maternity leave as well as fathers making use of family leave. Fathers of infants in California are 46 percent more likely to be on leave when CA-PFL is available.¹³

3

Benefits to companies that provide paid leave

By taking a "cooperative federalism approach," we may see more paid maternity leave policies be put in place.

By offering benefits to companies who offer paid maternity leave, it will help companies see twofold benefits: increased worker productivity and likelihood to return along with the governmentally-provided benefits.⁶

4

Make Paid Maternity Leave More Accessible

Currently, paid maternity leave on balance, more accessible to higher-income, white women for a plethora of reasons.⁶ The United States needs to make paid maternity leave more accessible by creating a universal paid leave policy, not just for high salary jobs.

BENEFITS OF PAID MATERNITY LEAVE

MOTHER BENEFITS

Maternity leave can lessen the likelihood of mothers experiencing postpartum depression, which 50-75% of mothers experience after childbirth.⁹ According to a study exploring the link between postpartum depression and maternity leave, among women who took maternity leaves of 12 weeks or less, every additional week of leave was associated with a lesser odds of experiencing postpartum depressive symptoms. Among women who took maternity leaves longer than 12 weeks, leave duration was not associated with postpartum depression symptoms.⁹

CHILD BENEFITS

Child-parent interactions can aid the child in developing. Increased mother-child interactions can have developmental benefits such as emotional regulation, theory of mind, empathy, and attachment security.² Paid maternity leave can also allow mothers to breastfeed for longer, which has positive impacts on the child ranging from higher intelligence for children to reduced risks of breast cancer for mothers.¹⁰

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Paid leave increases the likelihood that mothers will return to work after childbirth, and then work more hours and earn higher wages.¹¹ One study finds that women with access to leave are around 40 percent more likely to return to work at some point after childbirth than those who do not have access. The study also finds that women who have access to leave are less likely to return to work in the first 12 weeks after giving birth than women without leave, but that after 12 weeks they were 69 percent more likely to return than their counterparts without leave.¹²

Criticism of Paid Maternity Leave

Myth: Forcing paid maternity leave upon businesses "without regard to business size and revenue" leads to stifled competition and economic consequences.¹⁴

Reality: Businesses also benefit from paid maternity leave in the form of increased productivity, more hours worked, and likelihood of mothers to return.⁶ Also, since a universal paid maternity leave policy would affect all companies, competition would not be stifled.

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