

Paid Family Leave and Maternal & Infant Outcomes

TX RPC Project Legislative Rapid Response Request

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Background

Enacted in 1993, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is a federal policy implemented to support parental and family leave within the United States. The FMLA allows for 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to qualified workers with continuous health insurance coverage following the birth, adoption, or placement of a foster child. With Paid Family Leave (PFL), parents and infants have adequate time to receive postpartum medical care. Approximately 56% of workers in the U.S. qualify for FMLA, which excludes many parents who may earn lower incomes and do not have the ability to take time off of work. (1-3)



Whom Does FMLA Impact?

The FMLA and PFL primarily benefit higher-income individuals. (1) Since the FMLA only assists by providing unpaid leave to workers who qualify for the benefit, parents who earn lower wages may not be able to take time off because they will lose wages in order to take care of a child. (1-4)

Paid Family Leave & Maternal and Child Wellbeing

- PFL improves mothers' mental health by decreasing postpartum psychological distress. (5)
 - Mothers are 9% more likely to report positive mental health and 5% more likely to report coping well with the day-to-day demands of parenting. (5)
- PFL improves both mother's and fathers' health by decreasing their risk of being overweight by an average of 8% and decreasing their consumption of alcohol by an average of 12%. (6)
- PFL fosters better child-parent relationships by allowing parents time to bond with the baby and develop positive caregiving skills, which leads to mothers spending more time with their baby by reading to them, eating meals together, or going on outings more frequently. (7-8)
- PFL improves child health and development:
 - Increases the likelihood of initiating breastfeeding, which builds stronger immunity, reduces infections, and reduces infant mortality. (9-11)
 - Reduces the likelihood of low birthweight and preterm births (especially among Black mothers) (12)
 - Decreases the likelihood of re-hospitalization within the first year of life by almost half (47%). (13)
 - Increases timely immunizations and well-child visits for the infant. (14)
 - Reduces rates of physical abuse in children below age 2. (15)
 - Reduces the likelihood of asthma, overweight, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and communication delays through elementary school. (16-17)

Paid Family Leave & Family Economic Security

- PFL increases a mother's participation in the labor workforce in the months leading up to birth and a family's economic security after birth. (18-19)
- Mothers whose companies maintain their employment post-birth and receive a portion of their salary during leave may increase parents' likelihood of staying at their job or within the workforce long term. (20)
- Continued relationships with pre-birth employers could reduce parental time spent looking for work and reduce employer time spent seeking applicants. (21)

PFL also results in significant healthcare cost savings across the U.S. (18)

Recent savings estimates include:

\$11.4 BILLION

saved from fewer
low birthweight
births

\$9.2 BILLION

saved from prevention
of postpartum
depression

\$3.6 BILLION

saved due to
reduced infant
hospitalizations

\$2.7 BILLION

saved in reduced
food insecurity
among parents

Racial Disparities in Paid Family Leave

- Black and Hispanic workers are less likely than their white counterparts to have any paid leave. (23)
- PFL maternal outcomes are pronounced for Black and Hispanic women, with Black and Hispanic women who receive PFL reporting decreased psychological distress. (24)
- Black and Hispanic women are less likely to receive postpartum care if they do not have paid leave. (23)
 - The rate of postpartum care Black and Hispanic women received increased when they received paid family leave. (23)
- A disproportionate number of workplace pregnancy discrimination claims were filed by Black women between 2011 and 2015, such as:
 - Being fired for taking maternity leave. (25)
 - Being denied a promotion or raise due to pregnancy. (25)
 - Physically challenging work conditions during pregnancy. (25)

Socioeconomic Disparities in Paid Family Leave

- Mothers with low incomes and low levels of education may experience particularly beneficial outcomes from state-level paid leave policies because they may be unlikely to receive paid leave from their employer, including:
 - Improvements in maternal mental health and coping skills. (16)
 - More timely vaccinations. (26)
 - Reduced child incidence of overweight and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). (17)
- Those working in low-wage or part-time jobs have limited access to paid leave.
 - Among the 25% lowest-paid workers, only 9% had access to paid family leave in 2020. (27)

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LEAVE CAN
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MARKET EXIT
BY, ON AVERAGE,
33%
WITHIN THE FIRST 5
YEARS AFTER BIRTH**

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