

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VALUING FAMILIES AT WORK: PRIORITIES FOR FEDERAL ACTION IN 2009 AND BEYOND

**CALIFORNIA WORKING FAMILIES POLICY SUMMIT
JANUARY 13, 2009**

INTRODUCTION

Workers should not have to risk their jobs in order to care for their families, or put their loved ones at risk in order to do their jobs. Yet in the United States today, millions face these predicaments. Workplace standards still reflect a 20th century assumption of a father with a full-time job and a stay-at-home wife. The 21st century reality is that most parents are in the workforce, most families need two incomes to be financially secure, and workers have caregiving responsibilities for extended family and community members. As a result of this mismatch, too many workers confront the impossible choice between being a responsible caregiver and a conscientious employee. Nearly half the private sector workforce has no paid sick days for routine illnesses, more than half do not qualify for unpaid leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and the vast majority of all workers have no wage replacement if they need to take extended leave for serious illness or to care for a new child. Millions have no control over their schedules; few can access quality child care; and those who work part time face lower wages, fewer benefits, and weaker government protections.

We need new enforceable workplace standards that provide all employees with paid sick days, family and medical leave with job protection and wage replacement, more control over schedules to meet caregiving responsibilities, and part-time work with parity in wage and benefits. These changes would apply to families at all income levels and of all types, including those headed by same sex-couples. In addition to removing barriers for women, the new standards would greatly reduce poverty, enhance economic security and have other positive impacts that would:

- Enable all workers to fulfill multiple responsibilities and achieve a decent life;
- Boost worker productivity, increasing job retention and business profitability;
- Prevent the spread of contagious diseases and promote public health;
- Improve infant health and reduce infant mortality;
- Ensure all children the foundation for strong social and intellectual development and success in school;
- Enhance senior health and independence; and
- Reduce overall healthcare costs by expanding access to preventative and early care.

The Valuing Families at Work Agenda

At the national level, the Multi-State Working Families Consortium and National Partnership for Women & Families initiated dialogue among diverse stakeholders to identify work-family priorities for federal action in 2009 and beyond. More than 54 organizations and unions have signed on in support of these priorities which include:

1. Make the Valuing Families at Work initiative a high-profile priority of the President.
2. Guarantee a minimum number of paid sick days for everyone in the labor force.
3. Ensure job-protected and affordable family and medical leave for all workers.
4. Ensure all employees have the right to greater control over their work schedules without penalty for caregiving responsibilities.

These measures are an integral part of a broader effort to rebuild family economic security and a prosperous economy. The broader platform includes additional recommendations:

- a higher, indexed minimum wage;
- high-quality child care, preschool, and public education with well-trained and well-compensated teachers;
- affordable and high quality health care;
- protection and expansion of workers' rights to join a union and bargain collectively through passage of the Employee Free Choice Act;
- a modernized unemployment insurance system;
- a strong safety net with expanded work supports;
- pay equity across gender and race;
- retirement security; and
- protection of workers' rights through guaranteed jury trials and meaningful relief.

During the current difficult economic and budgetary crises, both nationally and in California, it is particularly important that public policy be crafted to accommodate the caregiving and family demands of the 21st century. The California State Legislature has an opportunity not only to act to adopt forward-looking state policy to support working families, but also to send a strong message to the United States Congress and our incoming President that families should be valued at work.

POLICY OBJECTIVE #1 Put caregiving first.

Background

The Valuing Families at Work agenda items should be high-profile priorities of the President and Congress.

Recommended Actions

- A. The new President should highlight Valuing Families at Work agenda items in his Inaugural Address. This includes making a strong commitment that, in the new Administration, both the White House and Administration offices will be places where those with caregiving responsibilities are welcome and supported.

- B. The President should appoint the First Lady or other high-profile individual, such as the Secretary of Labor, to head a Presidential Initiative on Valuing Families at Work:
- The new Administration should institute a regular series of meetings of relevant Cabinet members and federal government department heads to explore work-family issues, including reviewing internal agency processes and rules, helping agencies become model employers, identifying research and possible policy initiatives, and ensuring that data needed to design and update work-life policies are collected regularly. *Goal:* Launched during first 100 days.
 - A high-level Presidential Council on Valuing Families at Work should be established to increase public support for widespread implementation of the Valuing Families at Work agenda and to call attention to its importance for ensuring family economic security. *Goal:* Launched during first 100 days.

POLICY OBJECTIVE #2

Support paid sick days.

Background

All workers should have paid sick days that can be used for preventative care and minor illnesses for themselves and their loved ones. All workers should have access to paid time off to attend their children's school activities and to address the effects of domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault.

Recommended Actions

- A. Congress should pass, and the President should sign, the Healthy Families Act, to give millions of workers access to 7 paid sick days a year:
Goal: Passage during the 111th Congress.
- B. Lawmakers should expand access to paid sick days to all workers (regardless of employer size or part-time status) and permit sick days to be used to attend school functions and to address domestic violence, stalking, or sexual assault:
Goal: Passage during the 112th Congress.

POLICY OBJECTIVE #3

Make family and medical leave fully accessible.

Background

All workers should have job-protected family and medical leave and family and medical leave insurance for the handful of times in their careers when they need extended time off to care for a new child, a family or household member with a serious health condition, or their own serious health condition.

Recommended Actions

- A. Congress should pass and the President should sign the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act to provide 4 weeks of paid leave for federal workers after the birth or adoption of a child.
Goal: Passage during the first 100 days.

Note:

The term of the 111th Congress is from noon on January 3, 2009, until noon on January 3, 2011.

The 112th Congress is the subsequent two-year term.

- B. Congress should pass and the President should sign the Airline Flight Crew Technical Correction Act to allow flight crews access to unpaid FMLA leave.
Goal: Passage during the first 100 days.
- C. The Department of Labor should review and update FMLA regulations.
Goal: Passage during the first 100 days.
- D. Congress should encourage the states to adopt family and medical leave insurance programs by providing federal incentive money to the states.
Goal: Passage during the first 100 days.
- E. Congress should update the FMLA to remove discrimination against part-time workers; lower the employer-size threshold to 15; expand the definition of family to a broader range of members including domestic partners and their children; and allow FMLA leave to be used to attend school meetings and to address the effects of domestic violence, stalking and sexual assault.
Goal: Passage during the 111th Congress.
- F. Congress should develop and fund a national family and medical leave insurance program, funded through a centralized federal structure or through required state programs. Extended family leave insurance should be made available to those caring for wounded military service members.
Goal: Passage during the 111th Congress.
- G. Congress should enact policies and fully fund income support to allow very low-income workers or workers with limited job history the option to care for a new child at home without endangering the funding for other child care programs.
Goal: Passage during the 112th Congress.

POLICY OBJECTIVE #4

Facilitate fair work schedules.

Background

All workers should have the right, without giving up current labor protections or rights achieved through collective bargaining agreements, to greater control over their own work schedules so that, consistent with business needs, they can meet their caregiving responsibilities. Such policies would include varying start and end times, advance notice of schedules, the right to refuse mandatory overtime, and the right to vacation time. Part-time workers should have the right to parity in wages, benefits and government protections.

Recommended Actions:

- A. Congress should develop and pass a worker schedule bill, allowing workers greater flexibility and more control over their schedules so that they can meet their family responsibilities.
Goal: Passage during the 112th Congress.
- B. Congress should develop and pass a part-time parity and protection bill, guaranteeing equity for part-time workers.
Goal: Passage during the 112th Congress.

For more information about these recommendations, contact:

Labor Project for Working Families
2521 Channing Way, No.5555
Berkeley, CA 94720

510-643-7088
www.working-families.org