



POLICY PAPER

# Paid Family Leave

## Our Position

1,000 Days calls for comprehensive paid family and medical leave that helps all working parents in the U.S. give their children the strongest start to life.

## What's At Stake

Unlike in most other countries in the world, in the U.S. parents are often forced to choose between taking time off from work to care for their young children and earning the income they need to support their families. In fact, only a small minority of private sector workers in the U.S.—typically those who work in higher paid jobs—have access to paid leave through their employers. Even more troubling is the fact that 1 in 4 women in America return to work just 2 weeks after giving birth, putting their health and that of their infant at risk. Ultimately, it is young children and their families paying the price for the country's inaction on paid leave.

There is strong evidence that shows that paid leave contributes to healthier outcomes for babies and their families. Parental leave can help reduce infant death and illness, increase the likelihood that babies get their pediatric check-ups and immunizations, and lower mothers' risk of health complications after childbirth and post-partum depression. Studies show that paid leave helps women breastfeed more successfully and for longer periods of time, enabling both mom and baby to reap the powerful long-term health benefits of breastfeeding. Finally, science tells us that babies brains are nourished by time spent with parents and caregivers. Policies that enable parents to spend time nurturing and caring for their babies—particularly in the early weeks after birth and for babies that are born pre-term, low birthweight or with illness—are critical to the healthy cognitive, social and emotional development of children.

## Solutions We Support

### A National Paid Family and Medical Leave Program

The U.S. needs to establish a comprehensive paid family and medical leave program that covers all workers, including small business employees and the self-employed. The program must:

1. Provide sufficient time off. At a minimum, 12 weeks of paid leave should be provided to working parents upon the birth or adoption of a child. 1,000 Days supports efforts to increase paid leave up to 24 weeks annually, which is especially critical to supporting women to breastfeed exclusively for six months, as recommended by the American Academy of

Pediatrics, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the World Health Organization.

2. Cover all employers and all employees. Paid leave must be available to all workers regardless of the size of their employer, the sector they work in, the length of their employment or whether they work full-time, part-time or are self-employed. Leave must be available to both women and men, regardless of marital status, and policies must be designed in a way to prevent unequal treatment in the workplace and hiring discrimination based on age, gender, sexual orientation and other criteria.
3. Ensure economic security. Employees' wages and benefits must be maintained so that workers are not forced to decide between their caregiving obligations and their jobs. In addition, employees must retain the right to resume full paid employment after taking leave.
4. Cover comprehensively. Any plan should be available for the full range of personal medical and family caregiving needs, such as those established by the Family and Medical Leave Act.

While pushing for the creation of a federal paid leave program, 1,000 Days supports ongoing efforts at the state and local levels to create and/or expand paid leave protections to employees. We applaud companies and organizations that have made at least 12 weeks paid leave available to all their employees.

## Call to Action

We call on Congress and the Administration to invest in the health and economic security of families by enacting a comprehensive national paid leave policy that ensures that children get the strongest start to life.