

PRESS RELEASE



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ICYMI: CBPP: Building an Equitable Recovery Requires Investing in Paid Leave

New Post from Center on Budget and Policy Priorities Highlights Historic Opportunity to Create Permanent, National Paid Leave Policy

Washington, DC — A [new blog post](#) from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities highlights the opportunity to invest in a permanent national paid leave policy in forthcoming recovery and infrastructure legislation. In the post, Senior Policy Analyst Kathleen Roming discusses how establishing a permanent, national paid leave program will bolster our workforce and build toward an equitable economic recovery, including the path for the program's passage in upcoming legislative vehicles.

Read below and [here](#) from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, federal policymakers created a temporary emergency paid family and medical leave program on a strong bipartisan basis as part of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. The recovery legislation that policymakers are expected to consider in coming months provides a historic opportunity to create a permanent, broad-based, comprehensive, and progressive program of paid family and medical leave.

Though the Families First leave program limited benefits to COVID-19-related reasons and did not cover all workers, it recognized that workers need to be able to take time off to attend to their own health, the health of family members, and caregiving responsibilities without losing their wages or jobs, and that employers' voluntary efforts to provide paid leave are insufficient to protect public health and the economy.

The United States is the only member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that does not have a national paid family leave program, and one of two member countries lacking a national paid medical leave program. Instead, we have a patchwork of federal, state, and local policies. Federal law affords a little over half of workers access to unpaid leave but provides no national paid leave. Nine states and the District of Columbia have paid leave programs at various stages of implementation, but two-thirds of workers don't live in those states. And while some employers voluntarily offer paid family and medical leave, the vast majority do not.

Workers in low-paid jobs and workers of color are less likely than workers overall to have access to any family and medical leave, paid or unpaid. Both groups are also more likely to have to forgo taking needed time away from work. Low-paid workers are 50 percent more likely to report an unmet need for leave, primarily because they cannot afford to take unpaid leave.

The benefits of paid leave are well established. Providing new parents with paid time off to care for newborn or recently adopted children contributes to healthy development, improves maternal health, supports fathers' involvement in care, and enhances families' economic security. Paid medical and caregiving leave lets workers care for themselves and loved ones when ill or injured, and reduces financial insecurity and stress during those times. Paid leave benefits businesses by improving retention and productivity, and can increase economic growth by boosting labor force participation.

The United States should establish a paid leave program that covers the workforce widely to spread costs and risk. It should include comprehensive reasons for leave, including caring for a new child, a worker's serious health condition, and caregiving for a family member with a serious health condition — and possibly other reasons, such as during natural disasters or public health emergencies. It should be generous enough that low- and middle-income workers can meet their families' needs while on leave. The program should also include robust outreach and a straightforward application process. One way to finance a paid leave program is through a modest payroll tax that spreads costs widely, as states with paid leave programs have instituted.

Importantly, a paid leave program can be established through a budget reconciliation process, which may be used for recovery legislation later this year; all of these key program features can be enacted through that process, depending on their design.

Policymakers should act this year to enact a paid leave program that incorporates these design features and ensures that the needs of people in low-paid jobs and workers of color are prioritized and that paid leave is accessible to workers who need it most. Establishing a

permanent paid leave program will help us build toward an equitable recovery, where workers no longer must choose between their paychecks and their health or their families.

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The Paid Leave for All campaign is a growing collaborative of organizations fighting for paid family and medical leave for all working people. Learn more about Paid Leave for All [here](#).