

THE OFFICE OF
The Duke and Duchess of Sussex

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C.

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.

October 20, 2021

Dear Leader Schumer and Speaker Pelosi,

I'm not an elected official, and I'm not a politician. I am, like many, an engaged citizen and a parent. And because you and your congressional colleagues have a role in shaping family outcomes for generations to come, that's why I'm writing to you at this deeply important time—as a mom—to advocate for paid leave.

Over the past 20 months, the pandemic has exposed long-existing fault lines in our communities. At an alarming rate, millions of women dropped out of the workforce, staying home with their kids as schools and daycares were closed, and looking after loved ones full-time. The working mom or parent is facing the conflict of being present or being paid. The sacrifice of either comes at a great cost.

For many, this sacrifice goes back further than the past 20 months; it's 20 or 30 years, even longer—decades of giving time, body, and endless energy not just in the pursuit of the American dream, but simply the dream of stability.

I grew up on the \$4.99 salad bar at Sizzler—it may have cost less back then (to be honest, I can't remember)—but what I do remember was the feeling: I knew how hard my parents worked to afford this because even at five bucks, eating out was something special, and I felt lucky. And as a Girl Scout, when my troop would go to dinner for a big celebration, it was back to that same salad bar or The Old Spaghetti Factory—because that's what those families could afford to do too.

I started working (at the local frozen yogurt shop) at the age of 13. I waited tables, babysat, and piecemealed jobs together to cover odds and ends. I worked all my life and saved when and where I could—but even that was a luxury—because usually it was about making ends meet and having enough to pay my rent and put gas in my car.

I expect many of your constituents have their own version of that story. Perhaps you do too. People in our country work incredibly hard, and yet the ask is soft: for a level playing field to achieve their version of a common dream—what is fair, and equal, and right. Many of our economic systems are past their expiration date, and as you well know, too many Americans are forced to shortchange themselves when it comes to what matters to them.

In June, my husband and I welcomed our second child. Like *any* parents, we were overjoyed. Like *many* parents, we were overwhelmed. Like *fewer* parents, we weren't confronted with the harsh reality of either spending those first few critical months with our baby or going back to work. We knew we could take her home, and in that vital (and sacred) stage, devote any and everything to our kids and to our family. We knew that by doing so we wouldn't have to make impossible choices about childcare, work, and medical care that so many have to make every single day.

No family should be faced with these decisions. No family should have to choose between earning a living and having the freedom to take care of their child (or a loved one, or themselves, as we would see with a comprehensive paid leave plan).

In taking care of your child, you take care of your community, and you take care of your country—because when paid leave is a right, we’re creating a foundation that helps address mental health outcomes, health care costs, and economic strength at the starting line. Instead, as it stands now, we spend a fortune as a country paying into symptoms rather than causes. I understand that with everything going on these days, people might find it easy to be apathetic about what’s happening in Washington, D.C. And then equally, when it feels like your voice doesn’t matter, you tend to use it less often, but with stakes this high none of us can afford to let apathy win.

I’m writing to you on behalf of millions of American families who *are* using their voices to say that comprehensive paid leave should not be a place to compromise or negotiate. In fact, most nations already have paid leave policies in place. Estonia, for example, offers over a year and a half of leave to be shared by new parents. Many other countries have robust programs that give months of time for both parents (birth or adoptive) to be home with their child. The United States, in stark contrast, does not federally guarantee any person a single day of paid leave. And fewer than one in four workers has dedicated paid family leave through their employer. I’m sure you agree that if we are to continue to be exceptional, then we can’t be the exception.

The families you represent need your strong leadership. With paid leave on the cusp of becoming a national reality, I trust you will meet this moment. I know you must hear from your constituents about the choices they are facing every day to make ends meet and care for their families.

Paid leave should be a national right, rather than a patchwork option limited to those whose employers have policies in place, or those who live in one of the few states where a leave program exists. If we’re going to create a new era of family first policies, let’s make sure that includes a strong paid leave program for every American that’s guaranteed, accessible, and encouraged without stigma or penalty.

I know how politically charged things can—and have—become. But this isn’t about Right or Left, it’s about right or wrong. This is about putting families above politics. And for a refreshing change, it’s something we all seem to agree on. At a point when everything feels so divisive, let this be a shared goal that unites us.

So, on behalf of my family, Archie and Lili and Harry, I thank you for considering this letter, and on behalf of all families, I ask you to ensure this consequential moment is not lost.

As ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Meghan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Meghan, The Duchess of Sussex