



***Statement for the Record:
United States Senate Committee on Finance
Hearing on Paid Leave Proposals in the COVID Era***

Dear Senators Cassidy, Hassan, and members of the Senate Finance Bipartisan Paid Leave Working Group:

Thank you for your attention to and leadership on the important issue of paid family leave, both before and during the coronavirus pandemic. We are grateful for your work to bring together a bipartisan group of leaders for the roundtable “Paid Leave Proposals in the COVID Era” to provide an opportunity for policy experts, business leaders, advocates, and working people and families to share their perspectives on how we can remain healthy, maintain economic security, and rebuild as we navigate this crisis.

On behalf of the 14 undersigned organizations, coalition partners of the Ohio Women’s Public Policy Network, we are writing to urge action on passing universal paid family and medical leave and paid sick days policies that address current gaps in the COVID-19 emergency leave policies and can meet the needs of all working people, during this crisis and beyond.

Paid Leave and Paid Sick Days Can Help Families, Businesses, and Our Country Thrive, But the Lack of National Programs Left Us Unprepared for the Coronavirus

No matter where we are from or what we look like, all of us work hard for our families and deserve dignity and respect in our workplaces. Unfortunately, this is not the reality for millions of working people who lack access to paid sick days and paid family leave. The coronavirus pandemic exposed cracks in our country's caregiving systems, and it highlighted the fact that, every day, working people are forced to face the impossible choice between earning a paycheck and managing their health or the health of a loved one.

Currently, without access to paid sick days and paid family leave, far too many working people are caught between the demands of their jobs and the needs of their families. This means not only that our economy and businesses are not reaching their full potential, but also that families across Ohio are set up to fail - and it left us unprepared when the coronavirus hit.

Comprehensive and permanent national paid family leave and paid sick days plans would significantly reduce the number of working families in Ohio and across the nation who are facing economic derailment, and they would promote stronger health outcomes as we continue to face the fallouts from this crisis. We have an opportunity to transform our broken systems to provide the kind of leave policies working people need to thrive, and the moment to act is now.

The Coronavirus Pandemic Prompted Action, But More Work Is Needed

As COVID-19 hit our communities, members of Congress came together to take action and passed federal emergency paid sick and paid leave benefits in the *Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA)*. These new emergency paid sick days and paid leave can help many working people stay healthy and provide for their families during this crisis. However, there is still work to be done to ensure every working person, no matter where they live or what they do for a living, has access to the leave benefits they need to take care of themselves and their families. Our nation's leaders must act now to secure paid sick and paid leave protections for everyone, no exceptions.

Unfortunately, because Congress left immense gaps in coverage in the emergency paid sick and paid leave laws, including excluding employers with more than 500 employees and hardship exemptions for employers with fewer than 50 employees, and under strict rules interpretation by the Department of Labor, millions of working people were left behind. By conservative estimates, in which all employers with the option to exempt themselves do not opt out of coverage for their employees, the gaps in the *FFCRA* still leave out between 68 and 106 million private sector workers nationwide. This means that nearly 47 percent of working people in the private sector are currently left without access to these emergency paid sick and paid leave benefits. In the case that all employers with the option to exempt themselves do so, a mere 17 percent of private sector working people would remain covered by the programs.¹ In our state of Ohio, these gaps in coverage mean that 3,989, 637 of our 4,815,946 workers could potentially be left out of this emergency legislation.²

The needs for paid sick days and paid leave are amplified during a public health crisis like the coronavirus outbreak, and there is a cost to not taking action. The disparities in access to paid sick days and paid leave can cause working people, particularly low-wage working people in the service industry, like those in restaurants, retail, childcare, and home healthcare, to feel compelled to show up for work even when they are showing symptoms or have caregiving duties. Many of these working people are in high contact jobs, and are unable to work remotely,

¹<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/news/2020/04/17/483287/coronavirus-paid-leave-exemptions-exclude-millions-workers-coverage/>

²<https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/frontline-workers/ohio.html>

which makes it difficult to contain the outbreak and contributes to the widespread and prolonged economic disruptions.

In an emerging economic crisis in which women are disproportionately losing their jobs and small businesses are suffering, in a public health crisis in which quarantining at home is crucial to containing the spread of disease, we need paid leave policies that preserve families' economic security, fuel our economy, and protect public health. A universal and permanent paid family leave and paid sick days policy would ensure that all workers are covered - and this is especially crucial for women, particularly women of color:

- **Without access to paid family and medical leave and paid sick days, working people - especially women - are forced to sacrifice their financial security or their jobs for the sake of caregiving duties or their own health.** Before the coronavirus hit, 85 percent of Black mothers, 62 percent of Latina mothers, and 53 percent of white mothers are key family breadwinners in Ohio households. Access to paid leave and paid sick days helps protect families' wages as they take leave to address caregiving duties or health needs. These policies are critical to securing the economic security of households where mothers are taking on a key role of breadwinner and caregiver.
- **Women, particularly Black women, are overrepresented among frontline workers who often do not have paid leave or paid sick days, in part due to gaps in the *FFCRA*.** Women are on the frontlines of this crisis as caregivers in their homes and essential workers in the workforce: In Ohio, women make up 67 percent of the state's frontline workers, 80 percent health care workers, and 85 percent of those in child care and social services. Black workers make up a larger share of workers in all three sectors of worker compared to Ohio's workforce overall, putting Black workers' health and livelihood on the line at much higher rates.³
- **Women often take on a disproportionate share of unpaid caregiving responsibilities for loved ones, before and during this pandemic, which makes them particularly vulnerable to job losses, reduced work hours, or leaving the workforce entirely if they lack access to paid leave and paid sick days.** According to one survey, 14 percent of women are considering leaving their jobs for this reason; notably, only 11 percent of men are also considering this. Women of color are even more likely to face the balance between the demands of work and family responsibilities: 26 percent of Hispanic women, 15 percent of Black women, 15 percent of Asian women, and 12 percent of white women reported that they were considering quitting their job because of caregiving duties during the pandemic.⁴

³ <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/economic-justice/frontline-workers/ohio.html>

⁴ https://fortune.com/2020/04/23/coronavirus-women-should-i-quit-my-job-covid-19-childcare/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=broadsheet&utm_content=2020042313pm

To Rebuild Our Economy, Working People Need Comprehensive, Inclusive, and Permanent Paid Sick and Paid Leave Programs

There are a host of benefits for women, families, businesses, and our economy that directly result from access to paid family leave, but the details of policies matter. National paid leave and paid sick legislation during the coronavirus crisis should be comprehensive, inclusive, and permanent, and they must:

- **Cover all employers, regardless of size or sector (focused on those currently excluded or facing exemptions from FFCA coverage: employers with 500 or more employees; employers with fewer than 50 employees; employers of health care workers and emergency responders),** to ensure that no working person or family is left behind;
- **Provide adequate wage replacement** for all leave circumstances to be accessible for all workers, particularly low-wage workers;
- **Adopt an inclusive definition of an individual who is covered by caregiving leave** to ensure that everyone in the community can be cared for if they need it, including chosen families, not just biological or nuclear families;
- **Provide adequate leave time** to address personal health or caregiving needs;
- **Include comprehensive coverage for reasons for taking leave** during the coronavirus pandemic;
- **Ensure that the benefit can be accessed immediately and without a waiting period;**
- **Guarantee job-protection, anti-retaliation, and anti-discrimination protections** for employees who take paid sick days and paid family and medical leave; and
- **Recognize that working people always need access to paid sick days and paid family and medical to address regular short-term and long-term health conditions for themselves and their families by establishing permanent paid sick days and paid family and medical leave programs.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear: We get through hardships by coming together and being all in for working people and families. Everyone, whether they are white, Black, or Brown, deserves the resources they need to live economically secure, safe, and healthy lives. One of the most fundamental ways we can rebuild an economy where all working families have the opportunity to thrive is to ensure everyone has access to paid sick days and paid family and medical leave, during this crisis and beyond. It would mean financial security for families, productivity for businesses, and an overall stronger, healthier workforce.

We, the undersigned organizations, collectively urge you to take bold, swift action to enact paid sick and paid family leave programs that fill the gaps in coverage under the *Families First Coronavirus Act* and establish comprehensive, permanent benefits. Our country's

leaders must act now to keep communities safe and provide immediate support for working families.

Sincerely,

1. Children's Defense Fund - Ohio
2. Equality Ohio
3. Jobs with Justice, Cleveland
4. NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio
5. National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Central Ohio Chapter
6. National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Chapter
7. Ohio Domestic Violence Network
8. Ohio Federation of Teachers
9. Ohio NOW
10. Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
11. Ohio Women's Alliance
12. The Ohio Women's Public Policy Network
13. The Women's Fund of Central Ohio
14. Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation