



A Prize Fight For Dads

June 2014

Why Fathers' Advocates Should Get Behind Federal and State Paid Leave

Dads play a crucial role in their children's development and well-being. That's why fathers' groups have been working hard for years to help them become more involved, loving, and committed parents. Together with shifting social norms, advocacy by and for dads is making a difference: fathers are increasingly seeking and taking on more caregiving responsibilities.

But fathers not only need skills and encouragement to fulfill their care giving goals; they also need time. In the United States, working fathers find it difficult to balance their family and work obligations. One major reason for that is the lack of a national paid family and medical leave program. For many parents, this makes taking leave for the birth or illness of a child extremely difficult.

A national paid family and medical leave insurance program, such as the recently introduced **Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act**, is crucial for dads and their kids and needs vocal support from fathers' groups. The FAMILY Act would provide most working fathers with paid time away from work to care for new babies or sick children. Until federal legislation passes, state efforts to advance family leave legislation also need fatherhood advocates' support. This brief provides an overview of the current landscape for paternity leave in the U.S. and the benefits of federal and state family leave insurance programs.

Dads Take Short Leaves, Mostly Unpaid

In the U.S., few men have access to paid family leave to care for a new child or a sick family member. Though some have unpaid leave, many families can't afford the lost wages such leave requires. Fathers in low-income families are rarely able to take leave.

- **Some fathers have access to *unpaid* leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).** The FMLA rules cover only about half of all workers (male and female), who can take up to 12 weeks of leave to care for a new child or sick family member or to recover from serious illness.
- **Few employers offer paid paternity leave, particularly to low-wage workers.** Only 9 percent of employees work at sites that offer paid *paternity* leave. And while a majority of worksites also lack paid *maternity* leave, mothers are still more than twice as likely as fathers to have access to this crucial time off.¹ Among the lowest-wage workers (both male and female), just 4 percent have access to paid family leave.²
- **Most men take short leaves.** Among men who take leave, 70 percent take 10 days or less, even though those covered by the FMLA are entitled to up to 12 weeks. This is likely because they can't afford to take longer leaves. Close to half of employees report that they would have taken longer leaves if they had received additional or any pay.³
- **Without pay, lower-income dads are less likely to take leave.** In one study, 55 percent of the dads who did not take any leave were in low-prestige jobs, whereas only 15 percent of those taking no leave were in high-prestige jobs.⁴

Family Leave Bolsters Child Development and the Father-Child Relationship

The evidence suggests that involving fathers early on and when children are sick is crucial. And more and more, Americans agree. Seventy-two percent of women and 63 percent of men think it is important for men to take more than two weeks of leave after the birth or adoption of a child.⁵

- **Paternity leave can get dads on track for higher levels of involvement in the long term.** Research shows a correlation between men taking more leave after the birth of a child and greater involvement later in direct childcare and other domestic tasks.⁶
- **Children's cognitive development gets a boost when dads take leave.** Children of fathers who take two or more weeks of leave after birth perform better in cognitive development tests and are more prepared to begin school at the ages of four and five than children whose fathers take less leave.⁷
- **More time with dad can mean less stress for kids later on.** Children with fathers who are actively involved during the first eight weeks of life manage stress better during their school years.⁸
- **Children with special health care needs do better when parents are able to stay home.** In one study, more than 80 percent of parents of children with chronic conditions reported that their leave taking had a good or very good effect on their child's physical and emotional health. In the study, 37 percent of parents surveyed were fathers.⁹

I think it's kind of an outdated way of thinking, that the mom does the child rearing and the dad goes to work and brings home a paycheck. The dad has to have a part in the family. I think having taken an active role in my kids' first few months has brought me a lot closer to them.

– Jason Butkowski, New Brunswick, NJ.¹⁰

Where Paid Leave Programs Exist, Dads are Rising to the Occasion

In the absence of a federal program, several states have passed legislation to establish paid family leave insurance. [California](#), [New Jersey](#), and most recently [Rhode Island](#) have paid family leave available for use by dads. These programs are funded entirely by small contributions from employees. Other states are also working to pass paid family leave insurance programs.

- **Evidence from California shows that a paid family leave insurance program increases the time fathers have to provide care.** Since California's paid family leave (PFL) program was implemented in 2004, the number of men taking leave to care for a new baby has more than doubled. Men have gone from representing less than one fifth of bonding leave takers to nearly one third.¹¹ Researchers have found that in California, PFL increased the average length of fathers' leaves by just under one week.¹²
- **Lower-income dads take time to care for their families under the PFL.** A study of the program found that among its respondents, the impact of California's program has been especially great for fathers making 20 dollars or less per hour and without access to health benefits. The median length of paternity leave for these workers was 8 weeks.¹³

- **In countries with more generous leave policies, men take more parental leave.** In an analysis of countries in the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) countries, researchers found that fathers are more likely to take paternity or parental leave when wage replacement levels are high. In the study, the largest percentage of fathers taking two or more weeks of leave was in Denmark (90 percent), while the lowest was in the U.S. (33 percent). While the U.S. has no national paid paternal leave program, Danish law has mandated paid paternity leave for nearly 30 years, providing a total of 52 weeks of paid paternal leave, including two non-transferable weeks for fathers.¹⁴
- **Nations with paid paternity leave report less inequality among dads taking leave.** In Anglophone countries without paid paternity leave, fathers who take time off during the first year of their child's life tend to be more educated and have higher incomes than those who do not. However, in Denmark, which *does* provide paid paternity leave, there are smaller socioeconomic differences between men who take leave and those who do not.¹⁵

“Men used to take only two weeks off when they had a new child, using sick leave and/or vacation. Today new fathers typically take around five to six weeks of bonding leave.”

– Human resources manager at a large manufacturing firm in Southern California.¹⁶

The FAMILY Act Would Help U.S. Fathers to Fulfill their Potential

On December 12, 2013, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) introduced the [Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act](#), a bill that would create a national paid family and medical leave insurance program enabling workers—including fathers—to take up to 12 weeks of partially paid leave to recover from a serious illness, care for a sick family member, or bond with a new baby. The FAMILY Act would cover almost all workers, providing 66 percent of wages (up to a cap of \$4,000 per month). It would be funded by very small contributions from employers and employees and administered through a new Office of Paid Family and Medical Leave.

State Action on Family Leave is Crucial

Until a federal bill like the FAMILY Act passes Congress, advocacy at the state level is still crucial. With Rhode Island passing a Temporary Caregiver Insurance law in 2013, momentum is building in several other states considering similar legislation. As more states adopt these important policies, support for a national program will grow.

Paid family and medical leave insurance is good for children, dads, and families. Advocates for fathers can play a vital role in securing new state legislation and the federal FAMILY Act. Join the movement to pass paid family leave and get dads involved in their children's lives!

[Contact CLASP to learn more and get involved](#)

Leave Glossary

There are many terms used to refer to time away from work to care for family members. Here are a few commonly used terms and their usual meanings.

Paid Family Leave	Fully or partially paid time away from work to care for a sick family member or bond with a new baby. “Family member” is defined differently under different laws and policies.
Paid Parental Leave	Fully or partially paid time away from work to care for a new child.
Paid Paternity Leave	Fully or partially paid time away from work specifically for use by fathers of new children.
Paid Family and Medical Leave	Fully or partially paid time away from work to care for a sick family member, bond with a new baby, <i>or</i> recover from one’s own serious illness.
Family and Medical Leave Insurance	An insurance system for providing paid family and medical leave that is funded by contributions from employers and employees, or by employees only.

Further Resources

- Center for Law and Social Policy
 - [Paid Leave Would Address Unmet Need](#)
- National Partnership for Women and Families
 - [FAMILY Act Fact Sheet](#)
 - [Dads Expect Better: Top States for New Dads](#)
- Center for American Progress
 - [FAMILY Act FAQs](#)
 - [What the FAMILY Act Means for Men](#)
 - [Job Protection Isn’t Enough: Why America Need’s Paid Parental Leave](#) (With CEPR)
- [Family Values @ Work](#)
- [Boston College Center for Work & Family’s New Dad Studies](#)
- [Pew Research Center: Roles of Moms and Dads as They Balance Work and Family](#)
- [Families and Work Institute: The New Male Mystique](#)
- [Businesses Support the FAMILY Act](#)

Sources

- ¹ Abt Associates Inc. *Family Medical Leave in 2012: Technical Report*. 2013. <http://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/fmla/FMLA-2012-Technical-Report.pdf>, Exhibit 7.2.1
- ² Employee Benefits Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics (Table 32) <http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2013/ownership/private/table21a.htm>
- ³ Abt Associates Inc. *Family Medical Leave in 2012: Technical Report*. 2013. <http://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/fmla/FMLA-2012-Technical-Report.pdf>, Exhibit 7.27, 5.5.2. and 5.3.14.
- ⁴ Leena Nepomnyaschy and Jane Waldfogel. "Effects of parental Leave and Fathers' Involvement with Their Young Children." *Community, Work, and Family* 10, no.4 (2007): 427-453.
- ⁵ "Two Out Of Three Americans Believe Men Should Take More Than Two Weeks Paternity Leave." Markle. 2000. <http://www.markle.org/news-events/media-releases/two-out-three-americans-believe-men-should-take-more-two-weeks-paternity>
- ⁶ Berit Brandth. and Ingolfur V.. Gislason (2012), "Family policies and the best interest of children", in B.G. Eydal and I. Gislason (eds.), *Parental leave, childcare and gender equality in the Nordic countries*. The Nordic Council, Copenhagen, Denmark.; Linda Haas and C. Philip Hwang (2008), "The impact of taking parental leave on fathers' participation in childcare and relationships with children: Lessons from Sweden." *Community, Work and Family*, No. 11, pp. 85-104.; Margaret O'Brien and Peter Moss. "Fathers, work, and family policies in Europe." *The role of the father in child development* (2010): 551-577.; Leena Nepomnyaschy and Jane Waldfogel. "Effects of parental Leave and Fathers' Involvement with Their Young Children." *Community, Work, and Family* 10, no.4 (2007): 427-453.; Tanaka, S. and Waldfogel, J. (2007), "Effects of Parental Leave and Work Hours on Fathers' Involvement with their Babies: Evidence from the Millennium Cohort Study" *Community, Work and Family Vol. 10, No.4*, pp: 409-426. Note: these studies do not distinguish between men who have access to paid leave and those who don't. A study that controls for access to paid leave would be helpful in pinpointing the role wage replacement plays in paid leave usage and the extent to which this also shapes father's involvement in children's care.
- ⁷ Maria Huerta et al. (2013), "Fathers' Leave, Fathers' Involvement and Child Development: Are They Related? Evidence from Four OECD Countries."
- ⁸ Margie Shields and Richard Behrman. "Children and Welfare Reform: Analysis and Recommendations." *The Future of Children* 12, no.1 (2002): 4-25.
- ⁹ Mark Schuster et al. "Perceived Effects of Leave From Work and the Role of Paid Leave Among Parents of Children with Special Health Care Needs." *American Journal of Public Health* 99, no. 4 (April 2009): 698.
- ¹⁰ See Family Values @ Work Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8f3AK15kHDk#t=22>
- ¹¹ Employment Development Department, State of California. "State Disability Insurance (SDI) Statistical Information." 2013. http://www.edd.ca.gov/Disability/pdf/qspfl_PFL_Program_Statistics.pdf
- ¹² Charles L. Baum and Christopher J. Ruhm. "The Effects of Paid Family Leave in California on Labor Market Outcomes." NBER Working Paper No. 19741. December 2013.
- ¹³ Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman. *Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California*. (2011). <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>
- ¹⁴ Maria Huerta et al. "Fathers' Leave, Fathers' Involvement and Child Development: Are They Related? Evidence from Four OECD Countries", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers*, No. 140 (2013), OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k4dlw9w6czq-en>
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman. *Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California*.