

Paid Leave

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Americans love paid family leave, but few have it.

That pretty much sums up the situation today. According to a 2017 poll by the Pew Research Center: “Americans generally support paid family and medical leave... But relatively few workers have access to paid leave, and access varies considerably by industry and by the type and size of the employer.”¹

Unpaid leave is a different matter. The federal Family and Medical Leave Act guarantees eligible workers up to 12 weeks of unpaid family leave. It is available to 88% of all civilian workers.²

But when it comes to *paid* leave, Pew reports far less access. “In 2016, 14% of civilian workers had access to paid family leave, according to the National Compensation Survey (NCS), conducted annually by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. The share has grown only slightly since 2010 (the earliest year with directly comparable data), when paid family leave was available to 11% of civilian workers.”³

The 14% of workers who have paid family leave is an average of both private firms and government employers. In 2016, 13% of private workers had paid leave vs. 19% of government workers.⁴

Size matters. The bigger the private organization, the more likely it will provide paid leave. In 2016, only 9% of workers in firms with fewer than 100 employees had paid leave. By contrast, NCS data show that 23% of workers in businesses with 500 or more employees had access to the benefit.⁵

Class also matters. The more “white-collar” the private business, the more likely it will offer paid leave. In 2016, in the construction and leisure/hospitality sectors, only 5% and

¹ Drew DeSilver, Pew Research Center, “Access to Paid Family Leave Varies Widely Across Employers, Industries,” March 23, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/23/access-to-paid-family-leave-varies-widely-across-employers-industries/> Pew’s analysis of paid leave is based on the National Compensation Survey (NCS) of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The NCS defines paid family leave as “leave granted to an employee to care for a family member (including a newborn or adopted child, a sick child or a sick adult relative) in addition to any sick leave, vacation, personal leave or short-term disability leave that might be available” NCS’s definition includes paid maternity and paternity leave

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

6% of workers, respectively, had access to paid family leave. But the benefit was available to 27% of workers in professional, scientific and technical services; 33% in the information industry workers; and 37% in the finance and insurance sector.⁶

Public support for paid family leave is strong. The degree of support varies, however, depending on which family member (child vs. other) is being cared for *and* which worker (mother vs. father) is taking the leave. Americans also varied their views as to the employer's financial responsibility. According to the Pew poll:⁷

- Following the birth or adoption of a child:
 - 82% said mothers should get paid leave, with 61% saying the employer should pay;
 - 69% said fathers should get paid leave, with 52% saying the employer should pay.
- In the case of a family member with a serious health condition, 67% favored providing a worker with paid leave, but only 39% said the employer should pay.

The public's strong support for paid leave stems in part from workers' "broadly felt" conviction that they will need it. Pew found that 62% of Americans said they have taken time off from work, or are very likely to do so at some point, for family or medical reasons. Among adults who have been employed in the past two years, 27% said they took time off during that period following the birth or adoption of their child, to care for a family member with a serious health condition, or to deal with their own serious health condition. In addition, 16% of Americans employed during the past two years reported that there was a time during this period when they needed or wanted to take time off from work but were unable to do so.⁸

There is thus a sharp contrast between the limited scope and slow growth of paid family leave in today's American workplace vs. the strong public support the policy enjoys, the widespread need the nation's workers have to take time off for family or medical reasons, and the choice a significant share of workers recently made to do so. The gap between public demand and policy response is large. The situation creates a compelling case to add paid leave to the nation's system of social insurance.

The bottom line is clear. All civilian workers should be guaranteed paid family leave. They should be able to take time off from work to care for a newborn child, welcome an adopted child to a new home, or care for an ailing parent without giving up their entire

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ Juliana Horowitz, Kim Parker, Nikki Graf, and Gretchen Livingston, Pew Research Center, "Americans Widely Support Paid Family and Medical Leave, But Differ Over Specific Policies," March 23 2017, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/03/23/americans-widely-support-paid-family-and-medical-leave-but-differ-over-specific-policies/>

⁸ *Id.*

income. Workers and employers should jointly pay for the paid leave program, consistent with the general principles of social insurance.