

Babies Need Comprehensive Paid Family and Medical Leave



The time after the birth or adoption of a baby is an essential time of development for babies and families.

Because early relationships nurture early brain connections that form the foundation for all learning and relationships that follow, parents and caregivers are on the front line of preparing our future workers, parents, and leaders.

Only 17 percent of all working people in the United States have access to paid leave through their employers. That means that many parents must make the impossible choice between taking the time they need to bond with their babies and losing their jobs or economic security. Parents also need paid and medical leave to take care of themselves and for situations that require family caregiving beyond welcoming a child to the family.

As few as 8 states plus DC offer paid family leave, a policy that enables families to support the well-being of infants and other family members.

Babies and their families need a comprehensive paid family and medical leave program that gives them crucial time to foster nurturing relationships that build strong early brain connections and bond with their babies, as well as care for themselves or for children with serious illnesses.

Working families need comprehensive paid family and medical leave. Strong policy solutions will:

- Be inclusive of all working people, no matter where they live or the nature of their job;
- Provide comprehensive coverage of personal medical and family caregiving needs as reflected in the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA);
- Allow sufficient time—at least 12 weeks—away from work to meet their care and health needs;
- Offer adequate wage replacement rates and benefit levels that make taking leave financially possible for everyone; and
- Protect workers from retaliation or adverse employment consequences for requesting or taking leave.

For more information, visit thinkbabies.org/policy-priorities-paid-leave or contact policycenter@zerotothree.org.

The Akins Family (Louisiana):

After exhausting her unpaid leave, Anna returned to work, rather than risk losing a job she needed and loved. But her son, Gareth, had severe allergies and asthma that led to multiple hospitalizations in his first year. Had Anna had access to comprehensive paid family and medical leave, she would have had the protected paid leave that she needed to address his needs without worry of losing her income and career. Not only would she have been able to spend more time bonding with Gareth, she would have been able to devote her full attention to what was causing his illness earlier, leading to an earlier diagnosis. Instead, she had to walk away from a job she loved to care for her sick child.

The Weiss Family (Virginia)

Cate used up all her paid time off during a difficult pregnancy, so when her son Jack was born, she had to take unpaid maternity leave for three months. During this time, while her husband was waiting to commission in the military, her family faced significant financial hardship. Not only did they miss her salary, but because she carried her family's health insurance, she owed significant backpay for their coverage when she returned to work. While she values the early bonding time she had with Jack, Cate's family still hasn't recovered from this financial strain.

The Buckner Family (Texas)

Shawnnita's son, Kaden, was born with severe gastritis and low lactase and palatinase levels. Before and after diagnosis, the family rushed Kaden to the emergency room countless times, where he was frequently admitted for care, because his symptoms could not be controlled at home. Shawnnita and her husband spent many days and nights with Kaden in the hospital. Even as their child was receiving emergency care, Shawnnita and her husband were compelled to pull out their laptops as he slept in the hospital bed next to them. They struggled with the expense of the special formula Kaden needed, and they could not afford to miss work.