

Connecticut General Assembly



News Release

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On Eve of 22nd Anniversary of FMLA, Nation's Eyes are on Connecticut's Pending Paid Family Leave Legislative Proposal

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HARTFORD – The Family Medical Leave Act turns 22 years old this Thursday (Feb. 5, 2015). But because of stark new realities of family caregiving responsibilities, two Connecticut organizations – the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) and the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) – are calling upon lawmakers to dramatically expand FMLA to include *paid* leave. The two groups co-chair the Connecticut Campaign for Paid Family Leave (<http://paidfamilyleavect.org/>), which is kicking off an ambitious proposal for consideration by the state's General Assembly.

Currently, just three states have a paid family leave policy, but because of President Obama's recent offer of federal money to help states create individual programs, momentum for paid leave is building. And Connecticut is leading the way.

If enacted, Connecticut's proposed legislation would create the most comprehensive paid family leave system in the nation. For example, among other highlights, The Campaign for Paid Family Leave recommends that *all* employees, including state and municipal workers as well as private employees, be eligible for paid family leave, and that self-employed persons may opt in. Additionally, they call for a plan whereby employees receive 100% of their weekly earnings up to \$1,000/week. And they advocate expanding the definition of "family members" so that grandparents, grandchildren and siblings be added to the list of family members on whose behalf the employee may take leave. (A full list of recommendations appears at the end of this release.)

The Campaign has been working with legislators on this issue, including Sen. Gary Winfield, Sen. Mae Flexer, Rep. Peter Tercyak, and Rep. Kelly Luxenberg.

Quotes on the Importance of a Paid Family & Medical Leave System:

Carolyn Treiss, PCSW Executive Director:

"Laws concerning family and medical leave must evolve to better reflect the realities people face today. When the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was passed in 1993, it was a huge step forward in protecting workers' job security. But now, with more and more employees needing to take time to care for their elders,

as well as their children and themselves, we need to expand and strengthen the law so that it offers *paid* leave. Paid Family and Medical Leave is especially critical for women, who still make up the majority of caregivers, earn less overall than men do, and suffer more workplace discrimination when they return to work after taking time off.”

Michelle Noehren, PCSW Events & Special Projects Director; and Co-chair, Campaign for Paid Family Leave:

“Too many people must choose between earning their salary and caring for their loved ones. Paid Family and Medical Leave would remove this terrible conundrum by giving workers a paycheck during their leave. And since the plan is employee-funded, it is not a drain on employers’ resources, making it both compassionate, and sound business practice.”

Alice Pritchard, CWEALF Executive Director:

“Connecticut has a proud history of leading the nation on issues of importance to workers and families. As one of the first states to enact a state Family and Medical Leave Act, we have a significant opportunity to lead again by creating a paid system so that workers don't have to choose between their health and their livelihood.”

Catherine Bailey, CWEALF Legal & Public Policy Director; and Co-chair, Campaign for Paid Family Leave:

“We urge Connecticut’s leaders to implement a wage replacement system that will truly benefit workers when they need it most. To bring workplace policies into the 21st century, we recommend an employee-funded system where eligible employees receive a minimum of 12 weeks’ pay with measures to ensure workers can return to their jobs.”

Recommendations from The Campaign for Paid Family Leave:

Connecticut has had a family and medical leave act in place since 1990, three years before Congress passed the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). These laws allow workers to take leave from work when they have a serious illness, or need to take care of an ill family member, an injured servicemember, or a new child. With only 16% of employers providing paid leave, however, usage of the law remains low, as most workers cannot afford to take time off from work without receiving a paycheck.

As Connecticut continues to investigate how best to implement a system of paid family leave in the state, advocates from almost 40 organizations and agencies have identified several key elements that should be included in any paid family leave proposals to ensure that the system is fair and helps employees maintain financial security while they are out on leave to care for themselves or a loved one. **(A complete list of supporters, with live links, appears on the last page of this release.)**

Campaign for Paid Family Leave Recommendations:

- ✓ All employees, including state and municipal workers as well as private employees are eligible for paid family leave. Self-employed persons may opt in.
- ✓ In order to be eligible for paid family leave, a worker must earn \$9,300 in a 12-month base period. Earnings may be with one or multiple employers.
- ✓ Workers may use their leave for the reasons defined by CT’s Family & Medical Leave Act with the addition of caring for a sibling, grandparent or grandchild, regardless of the age of the child or grandchild.

- ✓ Employees receive 100% of their weekly earnings up to \$1,000/week.
- ✓ Employees may take up to 12 weeks of paid family leave within a 12 month period with the ability to take leave incrementally. The waiting period before using leave is 5 days.
- ✓ Expand job protections (available through FMLA) to employees who take paid family and medical leave.
- ✓ The system is funded solely by employee contributions and administered by the Department of Labor.
- ✓ Include additional measures to ensure that employees are not retaliated against for using their leave.

Additional Information:

Accessibility: For a system of paid family leave to be portable and accessible, it's important that all employees, with an exception for those who are self-employed, are part of the system. The earnings threshold presented was selected based on a part-time worker working 20 hours a week earning minimum wage.

Expanding the definition of family member: Often, employees find themselves having to care for a seriously ill family member who is outside the definition of family member in current FMLA law. Adding sibling, grandparent and grandchild will accommodate the realistic needs of multi-generational households and those with disabilities or special needs, and enable employees to tend to the needs of their loved ones.

Reimbursement: In order for paid family leave to be useable by most employees the reimbursement must be high enough to provide a livable wage. This is especially important for low-wage workers.

Length of leave: 12 weeks of paid family leave mirrors the federal statute, and is intended to “make FMLA work.” Employees need to take leave incrementally because many people who are suffering from a health issue or who are caring for a relative want to be at work, but their demands make it difficult to work a full work day.

Job protection: Since all employees will be contributing their wages to the fund, they should also be returned to their jobs following leave. Not only does this boost employees' attachment to the workforce, but decreases employers' turnover costs.

Anti-discrimination: No one should face discrimination from their employer or face retaliation for attempting to exercise their rights under the statute.

Funding: While there are strong arguments supporting the idea that both the employee and employer should pay into a system of paid family leave, based on the experiences of other states, this proposal takes into consideration the needs of small businesses.

Supporters/Members:

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[CT Alliance of Basic Human Needs \(CABHN\)](#)
[CT Alliance for Perinatal Mental Health](#)
[CT Citizen Action Group \(CCAG\)](#)
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[Connecticut Parent Power](#)
[CT Sexual Assault Crisis Services \(CONNSACS\)](#)
[Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund \(CWEALF\)](#)
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