

WHAT IS FAMILY WORTH?

PAID FAMILY LEAVE ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

*From the Families Valued Program
of the Center for Public Justice*



CENTER FOR
PUBLIC JUSTICE

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Dear Friends,

When my first child was born, timing was everything. I was relatively new to my job, so I watched the calendar carefully. I had to meet specific timelines to secure health insurance throughout my pregnancy, as well as paid time off and job protection for the weeks I could not work after delivery. If my son had been born just a few months earlier, I might not have been able to remain employed, despite my being a breadwinner for my family. I would have been left with the impossible choice between getting a paycheck and spending time with my new son.



Parenting and caregiving should not unfold like a board game, in which a roll of the dice and a set of complicated rules determine who gets to nurse an infant, recover from childbirth, or spend a joyous day in the park with a loved one. Family – an institution that Christians believe lies at the heart of a healthy society – needs to be reclaimed from economic and social jeopardy or insecurity.

We can help reclaim and protect time for families through a national paid family leave policy. This would remove some of the complex obstacles to family caregiving, and empower Americans to care for their loved ones and themselves when they need it most.

This toolkit will provide tips on the why, what, and how of advocating for a permanent paid leave program for the benefit of all American families.

Policymaking is messy, and so are all of our lives. The aim of this campaign is not perfection, but progress, so that more people are empowered to care for their loved ones, more grandparents and parents are accompanied by family during medical treatment, more infants are nurtured by rested and healthy parents, and more Christians are acting in hope to support families.

Thank you for taking the time to speak up for mothers like me, for individuals like yourself, and for all of God's beloved families.

With thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Anderson'.

Rachel Anderson
Resident Fellow
Center for Public Justice, Families Valued

Section One: Families' Worth

Family life requires caregiving work. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this blatantly obvious, as parents and caregivers navigated a world where schools and community services periodically closed and children began to appear in their multi-tasking parents' virtual or physical workplaces.

More than 40 million American adults provide care for those over the age of 65. Over 60 million parents live with a child under the age of 18 in their home. Their caregiving labors form the foundation of a healthy society where the vulnerable receive attention and children flourish.

Although more than 70 percent of women with children under the age of 18 now work outside of the home, American work society places little value on family life or time off for caregiving. The United States is currently one of the few industrialized nations without a national maternity leave policy, nor does it guarantee paternity leave or paid time off for illness and/or family caregiving.¹

- According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, only **23% of civilian workers** have access to a formal paid family leave program.²
- The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the only federal policy protecting workers' time off for parental and family care. FMLA only **covers about 60% of the workforce** and it only provides **12 weeks of unpaid family leave**.³
- About 20 percent of U.S. workers – including 36 percent of Black workers and nearly half of Hispanic workers – have **no access** to any form of paid time off.



No time for Mom's rest and recovery or for an infant's health

When daycare teacher Alicia was pregnant, her boss said that her job would only be held for two weeks. The employer's concession was that Alicia's son could receive free care at the center. Two weeks after giving birth and still recovering from a cesarean section, Alicia went to work, with her newborn son in tow. Returning to work too soon placed both Alicia and her son at risk. Her son contracted respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), a dangerous infection for infants, most likely caused by an exposure at the daycare center. As a result, Alicia's son was hospitalized and struggled with chronic respiratory issues throughout his first year of life.

Paid Family Leave is Pro-Life

Protecting parents' time to care has a measurable impact on child health and mortality: when paid family leave is made available to parents, fewer infants are born prematurely and/or with

Some common reasons women seek abortions: they feel that a child would interfere with their education, work, or ability to care for dependents (74%) and they do not believe they could afford costs related to raising a child (73%).⁵

low birth weight, both of which are leading causes of infant death.⁴ At the same time, protecting parents' time to care also eases expecting parents' worries about both their abilities to care for children and the costs of raising them. Women have reported that these stresses are among the significant reasons for considering abortion.

Paid family leave also provides time for families to bond, which leads to better emotional, behavioral, and intellectual health outcomes for children. Giving parents time to care for their children is both pro-life and pro-child.

Additionally, providing our neighbors time to care for sick loved ones or recover from illness protects whole communities, especially during a public health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, researchers found that the emergency paid leave enacted during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic led to **400 fewer infections** per state per day.⁷

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics and other public health institutions, for optimal growth, health and development, infants should be breastfed for their first six months.⁶

Families need time to care, and there is a large impact on both our economy and society when families do not have the time they need. In 2020, parent participation in the workforce declined, as many chose to leave their jobs rather than continue to juggle the demands of work and family life that had grown unmanageable during the pandemic. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, mothers' workforce participation rate dropped 21.1 percent and fathers' dropped 14.7 percent between April 2019 and April 2020.⁸



The absence of comprehensive paid parental leave as a workplace benefit means that American household income, on average, drops right before and after a family welcomes a baby. For low-income parents in particular, this situation can result in financial anxiety and hardship.⁹

Faced with growing time commitments to families and caregiving, Americans deserve paid time off for nurturing. Although supporting families through paid family leave comes with a cost, families are worth it.

Honoring the Worth of Vulnerable Families

Throughout the pages of Scripture, the Lord calls on His people to support the impoverished, the vulnerable, and the marginalized. Yet hourly and low-income workers are least likely to have access to any type of paid leave and have little flexibility to take time off after a new birth or to provide eldercare. This illustrates the need for policy changes that honor the worth of these families and focuses on their unique experiences.

25 million Americans lack any paid time off for illness or caregiving, resulting in missed preventive health, delayed medical treatment, and spread of disease as workers show up sick, exhausted, and burnt out.¹²

- In the U.S., the average worker has access to 11 paid vacation days and eight paid sick days annually. However, most workers in lower-wage occupations do not have access to paid sick leave and just over half have access to paid vacation.¹⁰
- The majority of households with annual income below \$30,000 receive no pay while on leave for family or medical reasons. They can only care for family members until their savings run out.¹¹



No Time for Nursing an Infant

A Christian ministry that serves new parents shared this story: For the two years prior to the birth of her daughter, Jane worked at a call center through her pregnancy, up until she went into labor. “My work doesn’t pay for maternity leave,” Jane explained when she contacted the ministry. “They told me they would hold my job if I returned within the month.” Although Jane wanted more time with her new daughter, she felt compelled to return to work within a month after giving birth. Days after giving birth, Jane shared, “...[I]f I don’t go back to work in two weeks, we will not have enough money to pay our electric bill...I really wanted to breastfeed my baby this time, but I don’t think I can do it if I go back to work. It makes me sad.”

What is Your Family Worth?

Families are a part of God's good design. Families are a source of blessing and belonging, and all of us will experience periods of vulnerability when we need care or need to care for others.

Scripture Highlights the Blessing of Family

- Joseph saved his brothers and their families from starvation through his role as Pharaoh's second-in-command (Genesis 50:19-21).
- Moses was saved from the violence of Pharaoh by his mother and sister (Exodus 2:1-3). Ruth became part of the lineage of Christ through her loyalty to her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi (Matthew 1:5).
- Jesus called the brothers James and John, and the brothers Peter and Andrew, to serve as his disciples while they were working together as fishermen (Matthew 4:18-22).
- Christ became human and grew up in a family led by Mary and Joseph (Luke 3:39-40).

Candice's and Matt's Story: Paternity Leave Helps Provide Stability During a Season of Uncertainty

"Just as fast as I could exhale his name, [my son] was whisked into the infant exam room; they wanted to keep him in the NICU for observation." Candice hadn't planned for medical complications after her second child was born, nor had she expected that her mother would have a heart transplant that same day, followed by weeks of recovery. Facing uncertainty, Candice's family prayed for courage. Because Candice's husband, Matt, was able to secure paid parental leave, he was able to care for their toddler and his mother-in-law while Candice and the baby recovered. Candice recalls, "I was having intense bouts of anxiety. My husband's paid parental leave was instrumental...Matt had the flexibility to care for our children when I couldn't."

Family-supportive work policies enable us to fully participate in our varied callings at the office, at home, and at rest. Paid family leave is a critical piece of a redesigned family-supportive work system that honors the value of family and work. Those of us who believe families have a special and unique purpose in God's creative design have a responsibility to work for their flourishing.

Whether families are navigating a public health crisis, caring for a loved one at the end of life, or celebrating a new addition, the

current system is not working. We can stand up for our families and for our neighbors' families by helping leaders imagine and design systems that honor the dignity of work and family. We hope you'll join us in shifting the culture by advocating for family-supportive policies for the flourishing of all families – God's good purpose for creation.

Section Two: A Common Ground Proposal for Paid Family Leave

All Americans should be able to meet important family responsibilities without being threatened with financial hardship or job loss, and work should not undermine the family's health. Workplaces must continue to adapt. As such, we are asking Congress to enact **two pro-family, pro-care policies** designed to support all families, especially the most vulnerable:

1. Guarantee at least two weeks, annually, of paid medical and caregiving leave for all who work.

Paid sick days are the go-to resource when most Americans get sick. All who work deserve an opportunity to earn this benefit and to use it flexibly for themselves or anyone they consider kin whether it's a child, a grandparent, a good friend, a sibling, or an extended family member.

2. Establish a universal paid benefit for new parents and end-of-life caregivers.

Every parent who welcomes a new child by birth or adoption should receive a standard, modest benefit that supports caring for their new child for at least 12 weeks. Such a benefit should be accessible to stay-at-home parents and working parents alike. Likewise, those designated by hospice as primary family caregiver for a loved one at the end of his or her life should receive a caregiver benefit.

For parents who work, a universal new parents benefit would supplement the unpaid leave guaranteed through the Family Medical Leave Act and any employer-provided income.

Section Three: Take Action

Public policies have a direct impact on individual's abilities to care for their family. To promote the flourishing of all families, policies must reflect the needs of caregivers. Advocacy for sound policies is one way you can seek the welfare of your family and community.

Here are tips for maximizing the impact of your work:

1. Pray

One thing that should inform Christian advocacy is the work of the Holy Spirit. Advocacy work should first and foremost be motivated by a desire to be faithful to God's call to seek the welfare of the city (Jeremiah 29:7) and justice on behalf of the marginalized (Micah 6:8). The goal is not to win at all costs, but to participate in the work of the Holy Spirit in the renewal and cultivation of Creation, including the flourishing of families. Start your advocacy journey with prayer.



- Ask God to go before you in your advocacy and to help you trust Him with the results.
- Pray for a heart of faithfulness and to be motivated by love for your family and neighbor.
- Pray for discernment in meetings and wisdom regarding how to proceed.

2. Share your story

Your story is one of the most powerful tools in your advocacy kit. Work to develop your story into a clear, persuasive, and brief narrative highlighting the need for paid family leave. Your entire meeting with your elected official is likely to be 30 minutes or less.

As you are developing your story, reflect on these questions:

- Why is this topic important to you?
- Have you or someone you know ever needed time off to care for a loved one but been unable to take it because of a lack of leave?
- What happened? How would a paid leave policy have made a difference for you? Your friend? Your loved one?
- What are some key facts that might bolster your argument?
- Can you make a personal connection to the elected official or policymaker? For example, are they a mother or caring for an elderly relative?
- Who do you know who might also be interested in this topic or have a similar story?

General tips:

- Choose your facts and figures carefully, so that you can make the biggest impact in a short amount of time.
- Make sure you write your story down. If need be, practice it a few times.
- Be prepared to share your story with friends, potential allies, and local community members.
- If you gather a group to meet with your elected official, plan to speak for only 3-5 minutes. Even if you are going to a meeting alone, it is still best to keep it between 7-10 minutes.
- Share positive stories, too. Some of us have been able to take time off to care for a loved one, or have received such care. If you have a positive experience, share that story as a way to illustrate that all families should have time to care.

Barbara's Story: Companionship a Parent in Hospice Care

For Barbara, everything changed when her father, Melvin, received a cancer diagnosis as well as hospice admission. Barbara went on paid family leave. She and her husband became Melvin's full-time caregiving team. "I don't think I slept for the whole month of December," Barbara recalls. "Having that time to be with my dad, without the added strain of not earning a paycheck, was truly a godsend." Melvin's church family also rallied around the whole family: Melvin's pastor brought communion to the home, and members of the congregation made treats, visited, wrote cards of encouragement, and prayed. The day before Christmas Eve, Barbara's father fell asleep and did not wake up again. His family gathered around him and sat vigil until his death. "That month was one of the hardest of my life," Barbara remembers, "but I wouldn't trade it for the world...It was an honor."



3. Build a team

Advocacy doesn't happen alone. We need others around to provide support, to be a sounding board, and to provide a sense of community. Here are a few different ways you can build a team of people to advocate for these issues:

- **Connect with the Center for Public Justice and the Association for Public Justice** by following their social media accounts, signing up for the Families Valued Newsletter, or attending an event.
- **Identify others who might support paid family leave**, and invite them to join your advocacy work.

- **Request face-to-face meetings or convene a storytelling gathering.** Some potential partners may be unfamiliar with the issue, so hosting an event or meeting is a good way to share information while also encouraging others to do their own research and get involved in your efforts. Be prepared to share your story and relevant facts related to paid family leave.

4. Contact your elected officials

The path to policy work often starts through a conversation with an elected official. To know who you should contact, figure out which level of government you want to influence, and who represents you. Most states have a legislative website that shows constituents how to find that information. If that is not available to you, go to [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov) to find your federal representatives, and do not be afraid to ask for help locating state representatives.

Once you've located the relevant government official, set up a meeting with them regarding paid family leave. You can also find a sample email and letter on the Families Valued website. Here are some tips to remember during your meeting:

- Introduce yourself and your organization/church.
- Share your story, including a brief reason for your involvement with the issue
- Be courteous and specific about your requests. What do you want to accomplish with the meeting? What are you asking them to do?
- Do not stretch the truth or engage in partisan politics.
- Consider asking permission to pray for them and the members of their legislative team. It is a stressful job!
- Afterwards, send a thank-you note or email.
- Focus on building a long-term relationship and don't be deterred by resistance. Remember that it may take several meetings or legislative sessions before you see your desired result, so don't give up.

You can also attend an elected official's town hall meeting to ask a question about paid leave, sign up for your elected officials' newsletters and follow their social media accounts, or contact your elected official using the sample email and letter below.

Tools for Communication with Elected Officials

Sample Email

Dear Congressperson [NAME],

It is long past time to support families in the United States with paid family leave. I write to urge your office to prioritize establishing paid family leave so that pregnant women, new parents, and family caregivers are able to care for those they love.

An estimated 20 percent of mothers with a new child return to work within days or weeks of their child's birth. The pandemic has reminded us of the value of family care for elder family members and those who are sick.

I encourage you to work with your colleagues to establish universal benefits for new parents and end-of-life caregivers and to guarantee all workers at least two weeks of annual paid leave for meeting health and caregiving needs.

Sincerely,
Your Name
Town, State, ZIP

Sample Letter

Dear Congressperson [NAME],

It is long past time to support families in the United States with paid family leave. I write to urge your office to prioritize establishing a system of paid family leave so that pregnant women, new parents, and family caregivers are able to care for those they love.

An estimated 20 percent of mothers with a new child return to work within days or weeks of their child's birth. The pandemic has reminded us of the value of family care for elder family members and those who are sick.

As a person of faith, it is important to me that paid leave be universally available, prioritize those who are vulnerable, and support diverse cultural conceptions of kin. Further, paid leave should operate with administrative simplicity so as to minimize burdens on families and employers.

I encourage you to work with your colleagues to establish universal benefits for new parents and end-of-life caregivers and to guarantee all workers at least two weeks of annual paid leave for meeting health and caregiving needs.

It's time for the U.S. to get to work developing a national paid family leave program to strengthen and sustain the families that support our nation.

Sincerely,
Your Name
Town, State, ZIP

Section Four: A Theology of Work and Family

Scripture tells us that families are the most basic institutions, woven into the fabric of Creation, and the flourishing of families is critical to the flourishing of Creation (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15,18-24). The Christian story is about the unfolding of God's good intentions for humanity. In God's design, family life and work are integrally connected rather than placed in conflict. Consider three basic but important truths:

- **Family is the context in which we receive many of life's great blessings, including close relationships.**

Throughout Scripture, God uses family to illustrate that humans were created not to live as lone individuals but to exist in relationships with others. Family plays a crucial role in both individual and communal flourishing (Exodus 20:12, Psalm 127:3-5, Luke 18:16, Galatians 6:2, 1 Peter 4:8-11).

"For as much as each man is a part of the human race, and human nature is something social, and has for a great and natural good, the power also of friendship; on this account God willed to create all men out of one, in order that they might be held in their society not only by likeness of kind, but also by bond of kindred. Therefore the first natural bond of human society is man and wife [and, following, the connection of children]...For they are joined one to another side by side, who walk together, and look together whither they walk."
– St. Augustine of Hippo



- **Work was created for humanity and is inherently good.**

God's commission to the first human beings was, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Genesis 1:28) and "the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). God's commission to humanity in the Garden of Eden tied together both work and family.

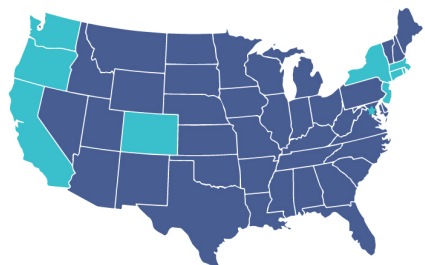
- **Rest is part of a healthy rhythm of life.**

Even as Scripture affirms the goodness of work, it establishes limits on work. This is illustrated first and foremost by God's decision to rest on the seventh day of Creation (Genesis 2:2-3). It can also be seen in the list of the Ten Commandments famously given to Moses at Mount Sinai, which govern the lives of God's people (Exodus 20:8-11). Throughout the rest of Scripture, too, rest is presented as good and as something for humanity to desire and enjoy, something which has its source in God (Psalm 127:2, Jeremiah 31:25, Matthew 11:28).

If a society does not protect time for rest, it dishonors what it means to be human.

Section Five: Fast Facts

Of the 41 middle- and high-income countries that are part of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) or European Union (EU), **the U.S. is the only one in which paid maternity leave is not nationally available to mothers.**¹³



As of August 2021, **only 9 states** (CA, CO, CT, MA, NJ, NY, OR, RI and WA) and the District of Columbia have a paid family and/or medical leave program for their residents. But the majority of U.S. states do not offer paid family leave.¹⁴

21% of civilian workers have access to a formal paid family leave program through their employer or a state program.

Additionally, only 9% of workers with incomes in the lowest 25%, and only 36% of workers with incomes in the top 10%, have access to formal paid family leave programs. In a 2016 Pew Survey, **62% of surveyed workers with household incomes below \$30,000 reported receiving no pay while on leave.**¹⁶



Data indicate that **at least 20% of new mothers** in the U.S. return to work within the first few weeks after giving birth. Over 50% of parents who took parental leave and were surveyed by Pew in 2016 said they took less time off from work than needed.

69% of those parents said they took less time off from work than needed because they could not afford to lose more income.¹⁸

Only **35%** of married couples with children have three months of liquid savings.

Three months of savings is the amount a family might need to make ends meet during an unpaid maternity or paternity leave. Families of color are even less likely to have household wealth to cover family leave. In 2019, the median wealth of white households was \$188,200, while the wealth of black households was less than 15% of that (\$24,000), and that of Hispanics was slightly more than 19% of that (\$36,100).²⁰

These factors often influence whether or not a woman has an abortion. In a survey of women who seek abortions,

74% of women believed that having a child would interfere with their education, work, or ability to care for dependents

73% believed that they could not afford costs related to raising a child. Other studies have also found that financial worries are among the predominant reasons given for seeking an abortion.²¹

Having a parent around is extremely impactful for children in their early childhood. The development of young children, including their brain development, depends on stable, interactive relationships.²² **1,000,000 new brain connections** are formed per second in the first year of a child's life.²³

A Liturgy for Caregivers and Those Who Love Them

Leader: Lord, we know that from the very beginning you set us in families. We know you set the lonely in families, and we are grateful for the many shapes our families may take. Whatever shape our families take, we thank you for the gift of community and belonging. Lord, we acknowledge that we are not meant to bear the weight of care alone. We accept your call to love our neighbors as we love ourselves and our own families.

Response: We commit to honor our families and love our neighbors.

Leader: Lord, open our eyes to the needs of our neighbors so that we may be the hands and feet of Christ.

Response: Who then is our neighbor?

Leader: Our neighbor is the father who needs to care for a newly adopted child...

Response: Who then is our neighbor?

Leader: Our neighbor is the mother forced to go back to work one week after giving birth...

Response: Who then is our neighbor?

Leader: Our neighbor is the stepdaughter whose stepmother is recovering from a stroke

Response: Who then is our neighbor?

Leader: Our neighbor is the co-worker who needs time each day to nurse her newborn...

Response: Who then is our neighbor?

Leader: Our neighbor is the restaurant worker who comes to work sick because he cannot afford to stay home...

Response: Who then is our neighbor?

Leader: Our neighbor is the pastor going through cancer treatment...

Response: Who then is our neighbor?

Leader: Our neighbor is the small business owner who wants to provide for workers but worries about financial and administrative costs...

Response: Who then is our neighbor?

Leader: Our neighbor is the parent who cannot keep her job through the winter cold and flu season...

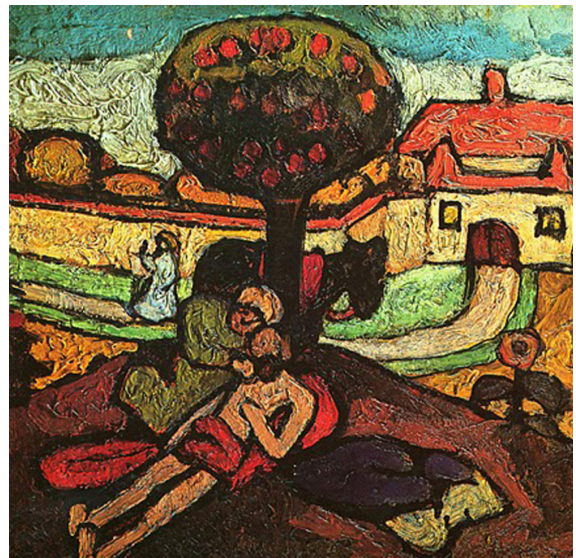
Response: Who then is our neighbor?

Leader: Our neighbor is the woman who has promised to accompany her good friend through surgery and rehabilitation...

Response: Who then is our neighbor?

Leader: Lord, help us to know how to best meet the needs of our neighbors whether through prayer, through a timely delivered hot meal, or through advocacy for a national paid leave policy. Be gracious and loving to the lonely, the disheartened, the exhausted, the overwhelmed. Let us not grow weary in well-doing. Equip us to seek justice and serve our neighbors in our churches, communities, in our state Capitols, and the halls of Congress.

Group: We commit to keeping your commands first to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength, the second to love our neighbor as ourselves, because there are no commandments greater than these.



About the Center for Public Justice

The Center for Public Justice is a Christian public policy and civic engagement organization. CPJ's Families Valued program promotes good work that enables all families to flourish. This work is grounded in and motivated by two core principles: The promotion of healthy families and affirmation of the dignity of work. We believe that, as the Psalm says, "God puts the lonely in families," and that humanity's capacities to cultivate family and to work are expressions of the image of God in each person.



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Association for Public Justice


The Association for Public Justice (APJ) is a nonpartisan organization devoted to civic education, grassroots mobilization, advocacy, and candidate development. We are an action arm of the Center for Public Justice (CPJ), a nonpartisan think tank devoted to policy research and civic education. APJ builds its work on a comprehensive, Christian political basis committed to principled pluralism.



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