

You Betcha We Want MN Paid Family Medical Leave!

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INTRODUCTION

Minnesota workers deserve a paid family and medical leave policy that strengthens families, increases employee productivity, and builds better communities for all. Current family and medical leave policy in Minnesota disproportionately negatively affects workers in lower-income careers ([Minnesotans for Paid Family & Medical Leave, 2023](#)). Rural communities also experience disproportionate negative impacts from current family and medical leave policy due to their proportionately older populations and higher rates of residents with disabilities that — when combined with geographic complicating factors such as distance from medical care, shortages in eldercare and childcare providers, and limited long-term care options — force residents to choose between supporting their families and the opportunity to fully participate in their local economies ([Center on Women, Gender, and Public Policy: Humphrey School of Public Affairs, 2019](#)). These issues will continue to plague Minnesotans until addressed. Enacting a paid family and medical leave policy is an important step in ensuring citizens are able to participate fully in Minnesota's economy and in building stronger, healthier families.

THE NEED FOR PFML

Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) will provide up to 12 weeks of paid family leave and up to 12 weeks of partial pay replacement for medical leave. A PFML policy would help everyone, including parents, foster parents, and families with health care concerns. Parents are offered the resources - such as financial stability - that they need to attend fully to their children's health and development through PFML ([Crespo, 2023](#)). Minnesota's current lack of PFML disproportionately impacts new parents, parents of children with special needs, and historically marginalized communities ([Crespo, 2023](#)). This jeopardizes Minnesota's opportunity to build and maintain healthy, inclusive families and communities. 90% of aging adults who remain in their communities rely on unpaid care from family members who have other employment ([Center on Women, Gender, and Public Policy: Humphrey School of Public Affairs, 2019](#)). Because PFML provides increased financial security, more of these older adults are able to remain in their homes and communities. Individuals in low wage occupations, who experience greater obstacles and stress as a result of economic effects, would benefit greatly from PFML. Low-wage workers more commonly borrow money and go on public assistance to cover lost pay compared to their non-low-wage counterparts ([Brown, 2020](#)). Minnesota communities have been waiting a long time to see PFML passed. In fact, the Women's Foundation of Minnesota has attempted to advocate for women on this matter for the past 40 years. They believe, as many others do, that "the ability to take a break and return to the job without financial penalty or loss of opportunity should be a right" for employees ([Perez, 2023](#)). Additionally, employers' profit from PFML because it reduces turnover rates and increases employee productivity and creates a level-playing field for employers. Most importantly, it demonstrates that an organization genuinely cares for its people and recognizes the importance of self-care. In conclusion, workers in Minnesota deserve a paid family and medical leave policy that supports families, boosts employee productivity, and creates better communities for everybody.

Access a previous policy brief on [Paid Family and Medical Leave here](#)

CURRENT POLICY APPROACHES

The current social safety net in Minnesota is a patchwork of coverage that fails to fully address residents' needs when it comes to caring for their family and their own health, especially long term. The current system relies on private employer benefits, unpaid family medical leave, and state and local legislation. From a private perspective, there are no regulations in Minnesota about how much – if any – paid sick leave or time off is offered ([Sick and safe leave, n.d.](#)) At the federal level, the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides 12 weeks of unpaid time off. This applies to employers with 50 or more employees and others who fall under certain criteria. This is currently the only mandated leave provided by the Federal Government ([Family and Medical Leave \(FMLA\), n.d.](#)). Minnesota has built upon this mandate by adding their own state-level Sick and Safe Leave and Pregnancy and Parental Leave laws. These widen the FMLA requirement for employers to those with 21 or more employees but are still unpaid. Employees can also use unpaid sick time and any employer-provided earned sick leave to take care of family members ([Sick & Safe Time, n.d.](#)). At the local level, four of Minnesota's largest cities, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Duluth, and Bloomington have moved to enact Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) laws ([Nesterak, 2023](#)). Ultimately however, whether the laws come from the Federal or State Government, city ordinance or employer benefits, these policies leave gaps that employees fall through, forcing people to go without income while caring for themselves, their children, or other family members.

PROPOSED APPROACH AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

“Minnesota Nice” is not a myth. We are kindhearted folk who value caring for our loved ones and are willing to give people the shirts off our backs. Having unpaid leave creates and aggravates many types of stress. Paid Family Medical Leave creates opportunities and minimizes stress to allow the employee to attend to their needs. The pros outweigh the cons of having paid leave, and PFML aligns with Minnesota's values. This position aligns with the National Association of Social Workers as it promotes the importance of human relationships and promotes dignity and worth of people ([2022](#)).

Recommendations

- **Pass HF2 and SF2:** HF2 and SF2 are inclusive and benefit low-wage workers, small businesses, and rural communities.
- **Maintain a benefit amount formula that provides stepped benefits based on the state's average weekly wage:** this will serve to increase equity for low-wage workers in Minnesota.
- **Maintain an inclusive definition of family:** a definition of family that includes relationships of blood or affinity and loco parentis relationships promotes equity and inclusion for the diverse representations of family present in Minnesota.

References



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