



Public Opinion About Paid Family and Medical Leave

Literature Review & Effective Messaging

April 2019

Introduction

Our nation can and should be a place where everyone enjoys full and equal opportunity. We are strongest when we all have a fair chance to achieve our full potential, contributing fully to our economic engine and social fabric. When everyone has the tools to support themselves and their families, the benefits flow to individuals, communities, and our nation as a whole.

Key to that full and fair opportunity is the ability to pursue gainful work while maintaining a safe and healthy life for one's children and family. Yet, in our changing economy, that opportunity is increasingly at risk as Americans must make the unacceptable choice between caring for sick family members and earning the full salary needed to support that family. Access to paid family and medical leave determines whether parents can care for a new baby or sick child, whether a dedicated worker can also dedicate time to an ailing or dying elderly parent, and whether a family health emergency will also become an economic catastrophe. Despite significant public support, political will has been lacking, leaving working families and national economic opportunity at risk. According to the National Compensation Study, only 14% of civilian workers had access to paid leave in 2016. Federal law has remained stagnant on the issue since the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which requires unpaid leave, passed in 1993, and state and local progress has been slow and uneven. The lack of paid family and medical leave burdens families of all backgrounds. It also worsens patterns of unequal opportunity based on race, ethnicity, gender, and income.

On behalf of the Opportunity Agenda, Lake Research Partners (LRP) conducted a review of research studies related to paid family and medical leave. This literature review synthesizes and summarizes relevant opinion research findings about attitudes toward paid family and medical leave. This report provides a detailed overview of gaps in existing internal and external public opinion research alongside a summary of what messages, messengers, mediums, and platforms have been most effective to date.

Methodology

Based on the scope of focus for this literature review, emphasis was placed on trends in public opinion data rather than studies that used original data. This literature review is intended as the first phase in a multi-phase research project to identify the best ideas, frames, and messaging that can support the development of a paid family and medical leave policy that is inclusive of communities of color and low-income individuals and accommodates different definitions of "family."

FINDINGS

I. Current Paid Family and Medical Leave Legislation

States are leading the way in implementing legislation to provide paid caregiving, parental, and medical leave.

- Using a social insurance model where benefits are modestly funded through employee-paid payroll taxes, a handful of states have successfully implemented comprehensive paid family and medical leave.
- Five states plus the District of Columbia have passed paid leave legislation.
- Once implemented in 2020, Washington state will provide 3 months of leave and higher rates of pay for low-wage workers. It is considered the most generous paid family and medical leave legislation in the country.
- In January 2019, Democratic state legislator and House Speaker Sara Gideon proposed legislation to provide Maine workers with up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave.

On the national level, both Democratic and Republican legislators want federal paid family and medical leave legislation but disagree over what to cover and how to fund it.

- National legislation for paid family and medical leave was once primarily supported by the Democratic Party, but the Republican Party is making it part of their platform, too.
- U.S. Senator Marco Rubio is working with Advisor to the President Ivanka Trump to draft a plan that would allow workers to draw funds from Social Security to cover paid parental leave, but doing so would delay retirement payments.
- In a national survey, 58% oppose a plan that would require workers to draw early from Social Security to pay for it.
- According to a national poll conducted by Lake Research Partners, voters across all parties prefer a nationwide paid leave program to a program that allows states to choose.
- The LRP poll also found that Democrats and Republican voters favor 6 weeks rather than 12 weeks of paid leave, whereas Independents are more in favor of 12 weeks.

Democratic voters tend to be more supportive of paid family and medical leave than Republican voters. However, there is a gender gap among Republicans.

- A 2018 Cato Institute paid leave survey found that among Republicans, support for paid leave has a large gender gap. Fifty percent of Republican men compared to 72% of Republican women support establishing a federal leave program even before costs are considered.
- The Cato Institute survey also found that regardless of costs, Democrats remain solidly in support of paid family and medical leave, whereas support among Republicans sharply declines: 70% of Democrats are willing to pay \$200 more in taxes each year for a 12-

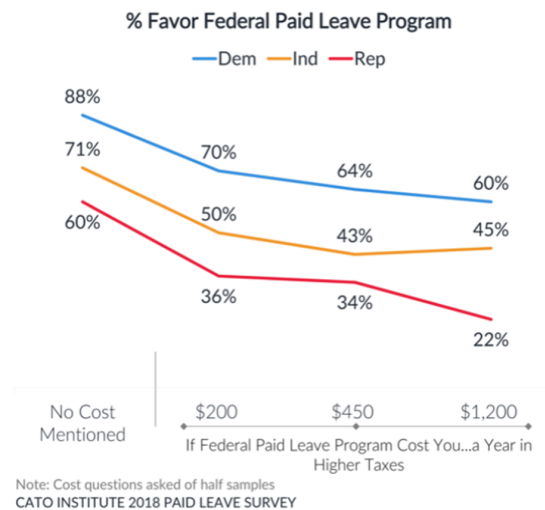
week paid leave plan, but only 36% of Republicans are willing to do the same. Independents are split down the middle.

- Most Democrats (88%) and Republicans (71%) favor a 12-week program more than they favor a longer paid leave program of 6 months.

Figure 1: Support for Federal Paid Leave: Party Affiliation

Democrats Would Pay Higher Taxes for Federal Paid Leave Program, Independents and Republicans Would Not

Would you favor or oppose establishing a new government program to provide 12 weeks of paid leave to workers after the birth, or adoption, of a child - or to deal with their own or a family member's serious illness? What if this program cost you...



Source: Cato Institute 2018 Paid Leave Survey, October 2018

II. Attitudes on Paid Family and Medical Leave: Small Business Community

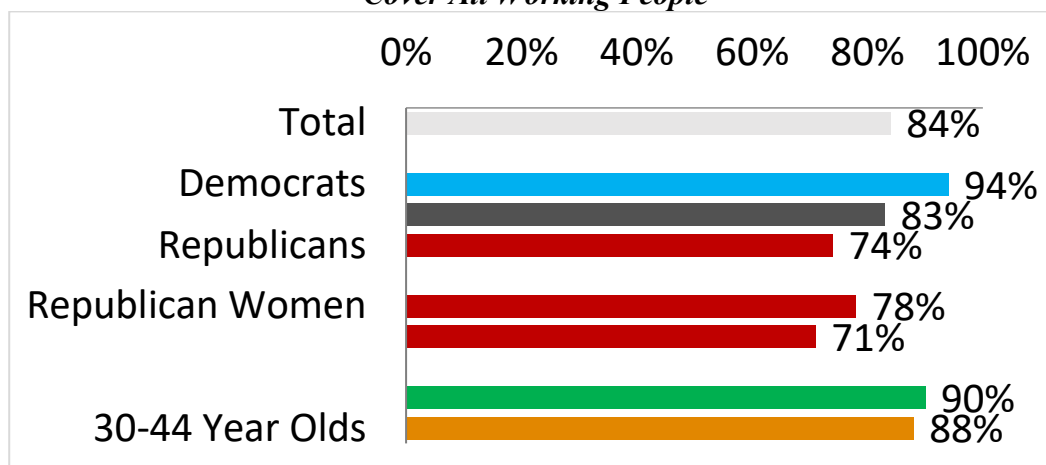
Small business owners are supportive of paid family and medical leave, which could give them a competitive advantage, but many would prefer that employers be allowed to choose whether to provide paid family and medical leave.

- Sixty-seven percent of voters think workers should be able to take a few months of paid time off if they have a new child; are experiencing a serious illness or injury; or are helping care for a seriously ill, injured, or disabled family member. According to the National Partnership for Women & Families (NPWF), however, 90% do not think workers can afford it.
- According to a 2018 paid leave survey by the Cato Institute, 74% of adults would favor a federal program that provided 12 weeks of paid leave.
- Americans are nearly split in the middle when it comes to support for a national leave program that provides 6 months of paid time off, with 48% favoring and 50% opposing such a program.

Polls show that there is a great deal of support for paid family and medical leave in the United States and the support is bipartisan.

- Voters across party lines prefer a paid leave program that applies to all workers nationwide rather than a program that allows states to choose.
- After hearing a description of the national FMLA and that it provides unpaid leave, 82% of voters feel that it needs to be updated to provide **paid** leave.
- A little more than five-in-10 voters think they could benefit from a paid family and medical leave policy now or in the future, and 72% of them are between the ages of 18 and 44.
- A majority of voters say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who publicly supports a national paid family and medical leave policy.

Figure 2: Total Support for a National Paid Family and Medical Leave Policy That Would Cover All Working People

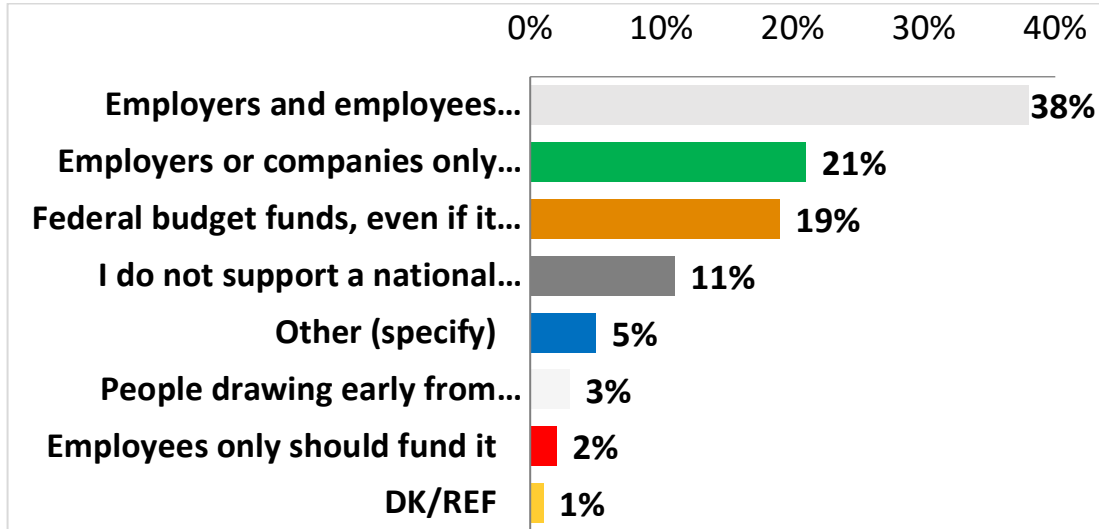


Source: National Partnership for Women & Families Report, “Voters’ Views on Paid Family + Medical Leave,” October 2018

In addition to supporting a national paid leave policy, most Americans are also willing to contribute to funding for such a program.

- A 2018 paid leave survey by the Cato Institute found that 54% of Americans are willing to pay \$200 a year in higher taxes for a 12-week federal paid leave program. Support for a national paid leave program declined as proposed costs increased.
- Four-in-10 Americans would support a federal 12-week paid leave policy even if it means that the national deficit would go up.
- According to a 2018 survey of registered voters commissioned by the National Partnership for Women & Families, 38% of voters think the best way to fund a national paid family and medical leave policy is through employers and employees sharing the costs. Results from individual state paid leave surveys show similar levels of support for sharing the costs of paid leave.
- In the same survey, 70% of voters are willing to contribute at least 1 cent per every dollar toward a national paid leave program.

Figure 3: Funding Options for a National Family and Medical Leave Policy



Source: National Partnership for Women & Families Report, “Voters’ Views on Paid Family + Medical Leave,” October 2018

Insights from dyads and focus groups conducted by Lake Research Partners suggest there may be opportunities to build support for paid family and medical leave among women of color and Independent/weak Republican women.

- When thinking about taking time off from work to recover from their own illness, provide care for a loved one, or care for a new or adopted child, few participants reported being paid for that time.
- Most participants prefer a national paid leave program over a state-based program to ensure universal access.
- The biggest fear that participants had when taking time off was losing a paycheck.
- Interestingly, when framed as a national paid leave program that would be managed by the federal government, many expressed distrust of the government and prefer that a private insurance company has control.
- Women, especially, expressed concern about company retaliation that might come from a mandated paid leave policy and saw job protection as one of the main benefits of a national paid leave program.

Working families respond best to messaging around paid family and medical leave that talks about helping your family and being there for them and that addresses the caregiving needs a person may have beyond simply parental leave.

- Most people have a basic desire to care for their family and have experience with caregiving situations. Making a personal connection to time needed to provide care and expanding the range of caregiving that a person may need during the course of life broaden support.

- It is more effective to frame the issue of national paid family and medical leave so people think beyond maternity or paternity leave and emphasize that it will be there in case of an emergency.
- When promoting paid leave policy, it is important to first establish a values frame with words like “family,” “stability,” and “treating everyone equally.”

III. Attitudes on Paid Family and Medical Leave: Caregivers

As the elderly population continues to grow, so does the number of people who are involved in informal caregiving of older family members. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 16% of the employed civilian population provided unpaid care to someone with an aging-related condition.

- Unpaid family caregiving has become the most common source of long-term eldercare, and adults who receive support from family members have better health outcomes.
- According to a 2011 Gallup survey, 17% of working Americans said they also assist with the care of an elderly or disabled family member or friend. It was also found that such individuals missed an average of 6.6 days of work annually due to caregiving responsibilities.
- Of those workers who assist with adult caregiving, 46% are men.
- Gallup estimates that the cost of lost productivity due to absenteeism among full- and part-time working caregivers is \$28 billion a year.

A growing number of Americans are recognizing the need to provide paid leave to care for an elderly family member who is seriously ill, injured, or disabled.

- Of the many voters between the ages of 18 and 44 who believe they could benefit from a paid family and medical leave plan, 65% of them say they might use it to care for an elderly, seriously ill, injured, or disabled family member.
- Support for paid family and medical leave is greater under some circumstances than others. Of Americans, 67% say workers should receive paid leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition, compared to 85% who say workers should receive paid leave to deal with their own serious health condition.

Access to paid family leave has demonstrable economic impacts, and lack of access has consequences.

- Single mothers experience a 42% drop in income after childbirth compared to a 10% reduction in income among households with other adults.
- In California, paid family leave has reduced a mother’s risk of poverty following childbirth, especially among disadvantaged mothers.
- According to a 2016 Pew survey, 48% of low-income workers who took unpaid or partially paid parental leave said that they also had to go on public assistance.
- The length of parental leave varies by gender and income in that the median number of weeks taken off from work is 11 weeks for women compared to 1 week for men. Among

working mothers, those with an annual household income of \$75,000 or more took a median of 12 weeks off compared to those with an annual income of \$30,000 or less, who took a median of 6 weeks off.

IV. Attitudes on Paid Family and Medical Leave: Communities of Color & Non-Traditional Families

A disproportionate number of those in communities of color do not have access to paid leave. A national paid leave policy would ensure equal access to paid leave.

- Eighty percent of African Americans and 62% of Latinos say they would face financial hardship if they were to take a few months of unpaid leave. More than a third of white respondents (39%) are very likely to face financial hardship.
- Unsurprisingly, 94% of African Americans and 91% of Latinos would support a national paid leave policy.
- Seventy-seven percent of African Americans and 64% of Latinos say they are likely to vote for a candidate who publicly supports a national paid leave policy.
- The most that the majority of African Americans are willing to pay for a national paid leave program is \$200 more in taxes a year (62%).
- Fifty-five percent of Latinos are willing to pay \$450 more in taxes a year for a paid leave policy program.
- Forty-five percent of African Americans and 47% of Latinos still support a national paid leave policy even it meant paying \$1200 more in taxes each year.

FMLA does not recognize same-sex relationships, so employers are not required to provide leave to care for a same-sex partner or spouse. Access to paid leave is a major concern for LGBTQ workers.

- According to the 2018 LGBTQ paid leave survey, 74% of LGBTQ respondents took less leave than they wanted or needed because of financial concerns.
- Sixty-five percent of LGBTQ workers worry that taking leave would negatively impact their job or career.
- For LGBTQ workers who requested time off for transgender-related health care, 56% said they were viewed or treated differently after requesting leave for this reason. Half of respondents also faced challenges such as colleagues not viewing transgender-related health care as a valid reason to take medical leave.
- Ninety-two percent of LGBTQ workers agree that the United States should guarantee paid leave for all Americans.
- Seventy percent of likely voters support giving LGBTQ workers paid family and medical leave so that they do not have to fear losing a paycheck or their job.

V. Effective Messaging for Paid Family and Medical Leave

Determining the best messaging and language that will move voters from support to action on a national paid family and medical leave policy is critical as both Democrats and Republicans prepare for the 2020 election cycle.

- Lake Research Partners and Chesapeake Beach Consulting conducted a survey among registered voters to determine what messaging and language resonated best among voters and paid leave activists in regard to taking action on a national paid leave proposal.
- When asked about policy names, **Paid Family Leave Act** is popular among both voters and paid leave activists. **Family Comes First Act** resonated especially well among Independents and Republicans.
- Overall, the top three policy names that were viewed positively among voters overall are **Paid Family Leave Act**, **Family and Medical Leave Insurance Act**, and **Family Comes First Act**.

Voters respond well to several of our key values in messaging, including the importance of family, the freedom to do what is right, and the recognition that caregiving is part of life.

- Voters like a freedom frame that asserts that no one should keep you from a spouse.
- It is strong among swing voters to tap into the responsibility frame. Swing voters have positive feelings toward taking responsibility and being more involved.
- The concept of flexibility also tests well, as swing voters feel positively toward having the flexibility they need for their families.

Table 1: Effective Values in Messaging

Words and Phrases to Use	
Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families come first. • Family is what matters.
Fairness and Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No one should be made to work while seriously ill or kept from his or her family because of work. • Taking responsibility and caring. • Referring to people in order to contextualize them outside of the workforce.
The Workplace and the Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace standard or employment standard. • <u>Paid</u> family leave—people need to understand they will be paid while they are caring for themselves or their family. • Make it financially possible for people to care for themselves and a loved one. • Americans agree. • Economic security.

Statements that focus on the positive impact of paid leave on economic security and not having to choose between giving care and getting a paycheck have a powerful and positive

effect on voters and activists. Word choices like “workplace” or “public” do not affect results much.

Table 2: Tested Value Statements

Agreement With Values Statement		
Values Statement	Total Agree (Strongly Agree)	Activists
Having paid leave enables workers to maintain basic spending levels on things like food, utilities, and repairs—contributing to overall stability for families, communities, and a growing economy.	86% (65%)	100% (89%)
We must make it financially possible for people to care for themselves and their loved ones for a period of time while allowing them to keep their job.	85% (65%)	100% (97%)
We should promote public policies to ensure that people can care for themselves and their families without jeopardizing their jobs or economic security.	86% (63%)	100% (100%)
We should promote public policies to ensure that women can care for themselves and their families without jeopardizing their jobs or economic security.	84% (63%)	100% (99%)
It is not fair to make people choose between being good parents and being good employees.	81% (61%)	99% (88%)
Our workplace policies need to change to keep up with the new demands of this economy on working families.	81% (57%)	94% (83%)
Our public policies need to change to keep up with the new demands of this economy on working families.	83% (56%)	97% (93%)

The words used in a message, especially the first few words or “kickoff phrase,” can increase or decrease support. It is important to know how different audiences respond to particular words and statements.

- Beginning a message about paid leave that contains the phrase “nearly everyone will need to take time away” resonates positively with voters across all races but is especially positive among Latino voters.
- A traditional message about paid leave containing the phrases “nearly everyone will need to take time away,” “care for a new child,” and “choice between economic security and their families” receives very strong agreement across all political parties.
- Hearing language such as “ensuring access” or “between economic security and their families” evokes positive feelings among all races, especially Latino and Black voters.

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