

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

"Balancing Careers and Care: Examining Innovative Approaches to Paid Leave"

Tuesday, February 24, 2026 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being with us today.

Currently, the United States is one of the only wealthy countries in the world that does not guarantee paid family and medical leave to workers. This is in a country where so many of the workers are living paycheck to paycheck.

Over 100 million workers wake up every day not knowing whether they can afford to care for a new child or a sick parent. [The] majority [of Americans] don't know whether they can manage their own health without risking their job or finances. Not only do the vast majority of workers not have paid leave, but access to those benefits is also dramatically uneven. Low-wage workers and part-time workers are significantly less likely to have paid leave, as are working women and workers of color. The unfortunate reality is that the workers who need paid leave are the ones [who are least likely to have it.

Despite this grim picture, there have been victories for working people. Over the last two decades, we have seen multiple states step up and fill the gap left by the federal government. The District of Columbia and thirteen other states have established their own comprehensive paid leave programs.

In fact, in Virginia, Democrats are on track to create a strong paid medical leave program for workers. Now going through the legislative process, that program would provide workers up to 12 weeks of family or medical leave, with up to 80 percent of their wages. The program would ensure paid time off for important reasons such as bonding with a new child, addressing a serious health condition, or caring for a loved one. That's what it looks like when we decide that families should not have to choose between a paycheck or caring for themselves and the people they love.

But even with progress in some states, almost three-quarters of states do not guarantee paid leave. What is also concerning is that some states are also ignoring comprehensive programs and instead trying to privatize paid leave through voluntary models. These voluntary models and partnerships with private insurance companies are low-quality and have not meaningfully expanded access to paid leave.

I appreciate the bipartisan interest in this topic, and as we review the different models for paid leave, we need to remember that now is the time for bold and meaningful action.

We need to set a strong federal floor and provide certainty to millions of Americans through universal paid family and medical leave. If we truly want to expand access, we need to establish comprehensive, guaranteed benefits rather than waiting for states that have not acted in decades to create weak, voluntary programs.

And while paid leave is critically important, we also cannot act as if what we're discussing this morning exists in a vacuum.

No matter what Committee Republicans may say this morning, they can't get away from their record. Just last year, Republicans made the largest cut to Medicaid in American history just to [give] tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy. Medicaid covers forty-one percent of births in this country. We are discussing paid leave for new parents while also gutting health coverage that makes those births safe and affordable.

We are also talking about economic security, while at the same time, nearly four million people are projected to lose health care coverage, and 20 million people are seeing their premiums skyrocket thanks to Republicans' refusal to extend the enhanced *Affordable Care Act* premium tax credits.

If we are serious about supporting caregivers and working families, we must be serious across the board. And we must do far better than the agenda that the Republicans have championed this Congress.

Paid leave, health care, nutrition assistance, and childcare are not separate conversations. They are part of the same promise: that in the wealthiest nation in the world, working families should not fall into crisis simply because life happens.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.