



Written Testimony of Adrienne Schweer

Before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Workforce Protections
Balancing Careers and Care: Examining Innovative Approaches to Paid Leave
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Chair Mackenzie, Ranking Member Omar, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the importance of strengthening access to paid family leave.

My name is Adrienne Schweer, and I am a Fellow at the Bipartisan Policy Center, a non-profit think tank that works with its advocacy affiliate, BPC Action, to advance bipartisan solutions to the nation's most pressing challenges, particularly those affecting workers and families. I appreciate the Subcommittee's attention to paid family leave as an important workforce protection.

Ten years ago, while working at the Department of Defense, I hemorrhaged while 12 weeks pregnant and experienced a high-risk pregnancy with my third daughter, Georgia. Back then, federal workers did not have paid family leave. For 26 weeks, I worked through a modified bed rest—no stairs, no picking up my toddler children, little activity, etc.—and I used almost all of my sick and vacation leave just to keep her healthy in my belly. The doctor visits and hospital stays were many. When Georgia was born—a healthy baby, thank goodness—I was able to take a little more than four weeks of leave before returning to work, thanks to the generous donation of unused vacation days from my Pentagon colleague, Julie.

I returned to work exhausted from nursing a newborn, barely healed from the birth, and struggling with stress from postpartum, and realized that I was lucky. Most women in America didn't get any paid leave. In fact, it is estimated that one in four new mothers return just two weeks after giving birth.

Upon Georgia's birth, I decided I needed to be part of the solution. Over the last decade, I have been heavily engaged in paid family leave advocacy and helped launch BPC's paid family leave task force in 2018, led by Maria Contreras-Sweet, former Administrator of the Small Business Administration, and former Senators Chris Dodd and Rick Santorum, with the goal of building bipartisan consensus and identifying pragmatic solutions that help families, businesses, and the broader economy.

Together with an amazing ecosystem of partners, we helped pass a 12-week parental leave policy for federal workers, so the mother or father in my old job doesn't have to suffer the same pain I did. We also helped pass an employer tax credit pilot program ten years ago—commonly referred to as 45S—and since then, improved the credit and made it permanent. Now, employers who provide paid leave to their lower-wage workers have financial support to offset

those costs. Additionally, we supported paid leave during the pandemic and increased workplace accommodations and protections for pregnant women.

These achievements change the lives of real people. But it is not enough, and many here in the House of Representatives know this. I am so grateful to have played a small part in helping the bipartisan paid leave working group, co-chaired by Congresswoman Stephanie Bice and Congresswoman Chrissy Houlahan, drive an incredible set of policies that further support the flourishing of working families, as they need real, bipartisan solutions that provide stability and certainty, at home and at work. I am also grateful to your colleagues on this committee, Haley Stevens and Julia Letlow, for their participation in this work as members of the Working Group.

The remainder of this testimony further highlights the urgent need for a national paid leave policy and the importance of sustained bipartisan progress to get it across the finish line.

Why the United States Needs a Paid Family Leave Policy

At some point in our lives, we will all face caregiving challenges, whether that's welcoming a new child, caring for an aging or ill family member, or addressing a personal medical issue that requires time away from work. Recent polling from KAConsulting, LLC found that 67% of voters either know someone or are personally affected by paid family leave needs.¹ But too many Americans still lack access to paid family leave, often forcing them to choose between their health, caregiving responsibilities, and financial security.

The 'typical' family now includes two working parents: More than 70% of young children live in households where both parents work, yet only 27% of employers offer paid leave benefits.^{2,3} This causes many workers, especially mothers, to reduce hours or leave the workforce altogether, contributing to declines in labor force participation and straining local businesses and the broader economy.

Today's prime-age workers are particularly squeezed, facing an increased likelihood of caregiving responsibilities for an elderly family member at some point in their careers as the population ages. A 2025 study by AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving found that 63 million Americans provide support for aging loved ones or young children, and nearly 47% of caregivers under age 50 are part of the sandwich generation, caring for both older relatives and

¹ Engage, "Engage Releases New National Poll Showing Significant, Bipartisan Support for Paid Family Leave," February 2026. Available at: <https://www.engagewomen.org/the-thread-mpl-poll/>.

² Rebecca Daugherty, "The Human Capital Case for Early Case for Child Care and Early Learning," Bipartisan Policy Center, April 24, 2025. Available at: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/article/the-human-capital-case-for-child-care-and-early-learning/>.

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2024," September 2024. Available at: <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2024.htm>.

children at the same time.⁴ About two-thirds of family caregivers report increased challenges balancing work and caregiving, forcing them to scale back hours, turn down promotions, or leave the workforce altogether.⁵ When workers have access to paid leave, uptake is high, with a majority taking advantage of the benefit; yet access remains limited to roughly 1 in 4 workers who have the benefit.^{6,7}

Today's America is characterized by dual-worker households, working parents also caring for an aging family member, and more low-wage workers balancing multiple part-time jobs that often don't provide traditional employee benefits—and are unlikely to be eligible for job-protected FMLA leave, forcing them to make tough choices between work and other family and caregiving responsibilities.

When workers lack access to a defined paid family leave benefit, they often cobble together other benefits to go on leave. In 2018, 66% of workers who took family and medical leave used a variety of leave sources to receive at least partial pay while away from work.⁸ Although low-wage workers took leave for family and medical reasons at rates similar to those of middle- and high-wage workers (18% vs. 14%), they were far less likely to receive any pay (39%) than their middle- and high-wage counterparts (80%).⁹

But there is good news: A substantial body of research shows how paid leave solutions help workers thrive while meeting caregiving responsibilities, and momentum is building across the public and private sectors to implement them.

Research clearly indicates that women with access to paid leave have improved postpartum well-being and increased breastfeeding rates.¹⁰ A 2018 study found that when women take paid

⁴ AARP, "New Report Reveals Crisis Point for America's 63 million Family Caregivers," August 1, 2025. Available at: <https://www.aarp.org/states/maryland/caregiving-report/>.

⁵ Tom Cobbe, Diana Mumford, et al., S&P Global, and Alessandra Raimondi and Teresa A. Keenan, AARP Research, "Caregiving While Working Calls for Workplace Flexibility," AARP, November 1, 2024. Available at: <https://www.aarp.org/pri/topics/work-finances-retirement/employers-workforce/employer-caregiving-survey/>.

⁶ "AARP Research Insights on Caregiving," AARP, March 27, 2025. Available at: <https://www.aarp.org/pri/topics/ltss/family-caregiving/aarp-research-insights-caregiving/>.

⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2024," September 2024. Available at: <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2024.htm>.

⁸ Scott Brown, Jane Herr, Radha Roy, and Jacob Alex Klerman. Assessing FMLA: Results from 2018 Surveys, Abt Associates, September 15, 2020. Available at: <https://www.abtglobal.com/insights/publications/report/assessing-fmla-results-from-2018-surveys>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kelly Jones and Britni Wilcher, "Reducing Maternal Labor Market Detachment: A Role for Paid Family Leave," Working Paper 2019-07, *American University Working Paper Series*, August 8, 2023. Available at: https://aura.american.edu/articles/online_resource/2019-07_Reducing_maternal_labor_market_detachment/23894085?file=41892246.

parental leave, their infants are 47% less likely to be re-hospitalized.¹¹ Beyond these health benefits, paid leave also leads to positive workforce impacts, including improvements to female labor force participation rates and the broader economy. Employers experience reduced turnover and recruitment costs, boosted retention, and improved economic stability, all of which support productive, thriving communities.¹²

In fall 2025, the Bipartisan Policy Center, in partnership with Cygnal, conducted a survey of parents with children under five years old to better understand their policy priorities.¹³ The results revealed clear preferences that can help policymakers shape solutions that center on children and families at each stage of life. Parents consistently identify work-life balance and financial strain as top concerns, and express strong support for paid time off that helps families manage major life events without losing income.

Key findings highlight the importance of paid parental leave, in particular:

- Paid leave is the most valued support in the first year of a child's life—more than job flexibility or tax credits.
- In the first year of a child's life, most parents support paid parental leave (37%) along with paid medical leave (15%).
- When welcoming a new child, 65% of parents prefer 12 weeks of paid leave at full pay to a \$5,000 baby bonus.
- There is a strong, broad preference for paid leave across nearly all income groups; only the lowest-income families (<\$25,000) are evenly split between leave and cash benefits.
- 86% of respondents believe all parents should be guaranteed paid time off after birth or adoption, and 52% say leave should be equal for both parents, not just mothers.

Bottom line: Access to paid family leave produces significant positive impacts for workers, families, and businesses.

Small Wins Build Policy Momentum with Real Impacts for Workers and Families.

Thirteen states and DC have mandatory paid family leave systems that mostly follow a social insurance model. Ten additional states offer voluntary systems through private insurance.

¹¹ Judy Jou, Katy B. Kozhimannil, Jean M Abraham, Lynn A Blewett, Patricia M McGovern, "Paid Maternity Leave in the United States," *Associations with Maternal and Infant Health, Matern Child Health J*, 22(2): 216-225, 2018.

¹² Lelaine Bigelow and Shamaal Sheppard, "Expanding Paid Leave Through Federal-State Partnerships," *Center on Poverty and Inequality, Georgetown Law*, February 2, 2026. Available at: <https://www.georgetownpoverty.org/issues/paid-leave/>.

¹³ Emily Wielk, "The Family Policy Gap: What Parents Say They Need and How Policymakers Can Deliver," *Bipartisan Policy Center*, September 25, 2025. Available at: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/article/the-family-policy-gap-what-parents-say-they-need-and-how-policymakers-can-deliver/>.

Moreover, the percentage of workers in private industry with access to paid family leave through their employer has more than doubled, from 13% in 2017 to 27% in 2023—and even more expansive for larger employers (500 or more): from 23% to 41% in the same period.¹⁴ As these states and businesses have stepped in, it has unlocked access for millions of workers nationwide. This has led to a rapid shift in the paid family leave landscape over the last decade, but the lack of a coordinated national policy has resulted in fragmented programs and uneven access for workers.

As a result, federal action can advance innovation in policy development, while ensuring that more workers can access paid family leave benefits.

BPC and BPC Action have been instrumental over the past nine years in advancing bipartisan policies to expand paid family leave and broader caregiving initiatives at the federal level. These efforts show the power of continued, intentional engagement to ensure that PFL remains a core priority despite shifting administrations and policy contexts. Some highlights from these recent efforts include:

- **2017:** Enacted the 45S Employer Credit for Paid Family and Medical Leave (45S), which helps offset the costs to employers for providing paid family and medical leave to workers if they meet the tenure, wage, and other eligibility requirements.¹⁵ In 2025, Sens. Deb Fischer (R-NE) and Angus King (I-ME) secured crucial reforms that make the credit permanent, among other changes, as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.
- **2019:** Enacted the Federal Employee Paid Leave Act (FEPLA), which amended the FMLA to allow eligible federal and defense employees to take 12 weeks of paid parental leave.¹⁶
- **2022:** Enacted the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA), which guarantees pregnant women the right to reasonable workplace accommodations.¹⁷ While not directly paid leave, it remains an important, related worker protection for women in the workforce.
- **2022-2026:** Secured enhancements to FEPLA that extend paid leave protections for more service members.¹⁸

¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2024,” September 2024. Available at: <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2024.htm>.

¹⁵ Emily Wielk, “Employer Credits for Child Care and Paid Family Leave,” Bipartisan Policy Center, March 12, 2025. Available at: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/employer-credits-45f-45s/>.

¹⁶ “OPM Releases New Guidance on Paid Parental Leave,” Fed Manager, August 11, 2020. Available at: <https://www.fedmanager.com/news/opm-releases-new-guidance-on-paid-parental-leave>.

¹⁷ “The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act,” Bipartisan Policy Center, May 3, 2021. Available at: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/article/the-pregnant-workers-fairness-act/>.

¹⁸ “Paid Family Leave: The Basics,” Bipartisan Policy Center, February 19, 2026. Available at: <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/explainer/paid-family-leave-the-basics/>.

Alongside these important wins, a bipartisan, bicameral group is working tirelessly behind the scenes to come together and chart a path forward for a federal paid family leave policy. As mentioned above, Reps. Bice and Houlihan stood up in 2023 the House Working Group on Paid Family Leave, along with a Senate Working Group co-chaired by Sens. Bill Cassidy (R-LA) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY).

Immediate Opportunities for Action

This work is a proof-of-concept that bipartisan policymaking is still possible, even desirable, but it's not easy. And for that, we applaud these members who have come together to learn, debate, and identify a potential path forward. Following a year of educational efforts and stakeholder engagement, the House Bipartisan Paid Family Leave Working Group introduced two pieces of legislation this past spring:

- The More Paid Leave for More Americans Act would establish a competitive grant program at the Department of Labor to encourage states to expand paid family leave through public-private partnerships. This approach supports state-led innovation and allows programs to reflect local workforce needs.
- The Interstate Paid Leave Action Network Act would support collaboration among states by facilitating the sharing of best practices and improving coordination across paid leave programs. This collaboration can help reduce complexity for employers and improve clarity for workers.

Together, these proposals demonstrate how federal policy can support families by empowering states, encouraging cooperation, and expanding access to paid family leave without imposing a national mandate. I strongly encourage the Committee to review and move these bills forward.

My experience underscores how critical paid family leave can be for families navigating major life events. Supporting state-led approaches to paid family leave allows policymakers to strengthen families, support workforce participation, and respect the diversity of the American workforce.

Conclusion

While many states and businesses have expanded paid leave policies—and paid leave reform bills have been introduced and passed in Congress this year—gaps in coverage still remain for many workers. Based on the available evidence and parental surveys, an important next step is to come together to identify areas of agreement and work to build a framework with input from businesses, families, and experts to advance paid leave policy. Sustained bipartisan momentum continues to pave the way for reform that will help millions of American families during key life transitions, make caregiving more feasible, and ensure long-term demographic and economic stability.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering any questions.