Vision

The lives and health of children are impacted by the paid work of their parents and other caregivers. Income stagnation in recent decades and the erosion of purchasing power have contributed to the financial instability of working poor families and harmed children. Financial stability means that the basic needs of children, such as housing and food, are more dependable and family stress is reduced. Child school readiness and academic performance are sensitive to family income as well. Children are impacted if parents cannot take leave to care for them or themselves or if they are let go from jobs because of illness or family needs. Yet, the impact of labor rules on children is too often an afterthought in this country. At some point, nearly everyone will need to take time away from work to care for a new child or address a serious personal or family illness. The United States is alone among advanced economies, however, in not mandating paid maternity leave at the federal level for new parents. And, only 13 percent of U.S. workers have access to paid family leave through their employers. Fewer than 40 percent have access to personal medical leave through employer-provided short-term disability insurance. The Department of Labor must realign its perspective to incorporate the impact that strong labor standards have not only on the worker but also on that worker’s family members as well.

Recommended Administrative Actions

Increase the minimum wage. Raising the minimum wage has been shown to help some low-income families reach 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) and to be considered “out of poverty.” Policies and programs that increase the earnings of low-income parents have been shown to improve child outcomes, including higher minimum wages, education and job-training programs, and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC). The next administration should commit to increasing the minimum wage.

Implement paid family and medical leave. The reality of 21st century work is that most parents are employed outside the household. In fact, most children live in families with either a working single parent, or parents who both hold jobs. This complicates things when a child is born, or when a family member becomes ill and needs to be cared for. Without job-protected paid leave that enables a parent to take a specified number of weeks out of the workforce, parents may face an impossible choice between their child’s health and their income or jobs. For this reason, the next administration must support efforts to provide working parents and their children with a comprehensive paid family and medical leave standard, which exists in every other advanced economy.

Recommended Congressional Actions

Increase the minimum wage. Congress should pass legislation raising the federal minimum wage to support America’s workers.

Pass the FAMILY Act. The Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act (S. 786 in the 114th Congress) would provide U.S. workers with up to 12 weeks of partial income when they take time away from work to address a serious health condition. These conditions include pregnancy and childbirth recovery; illness on the part of a child, parent, spouse or domestic partner; birth or adoption of a child; and/or for specific military caregiving and leave purposes.

About this Document

This document is an excerpt from Blueprint for Children: How the Next President Can Build a Foundation for a Healthy Future (http://aap.org/blueprint), which was produced by the American Academy of Pediatrics in September 2016 and has also been endorsed by the following organizations: the Academic Pediatric Association, the American Pediatric Society, America’s Promise Alliance, the Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs, Family Voices, the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, the Pediatric Policy Council, the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine, the Society for Pediatric Research and ZERO TO THREE.