My name is Jennifer Tender and I am a board certified pediatrician, lactation consultant, and one of the Breastfeeding Coordinators for the DC Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Today I am speaking on behalf of the DC chapter of the AAP which consists of more than 425 pediatric providers who are dedicated to promoting the optimal health and development of children and adolescents of Washington, DC in partnership with their families and communities.

I would like to thank Council Chairman Phil Mendelsohn and members of the council for the opportunity to testify in support of Bill 21-415, The Universal Paid Family Leave Act of 2015. The DC Chapter of the AAP supports The Universal Paid Family Leave Act of 2015 because it is crucial for optimal child health, infant development, maternal physical and emotional well-being, parent-infant bonding and providing families the financial security to care for their sick children.

Studies have shown that paid family leave has positive effects on children’s health by increasing breastfeeding rates, improving parent-infant bonding, enabling attendance at well-child visits, and ensuring the timely completion of immunizations.\textsuperscript{1,2} Mothers who take at least 13 weeks of leave are more likely to breastfeed and breastfeed for a longer duration.\textsuperscript{1,3} After paid parental leave was instituted in California, the state’s exclusive breastfeeding and breastfeeding duration rates increased significantly.\textsuperscript{4} One study found that California mothers who used paid family leave breastfed for twice as long as those who did not take leave.\textsuperscript{5} Infants
who are not breastfed have an increased risk of asthma, diabetes, ear infections, hospitalization for lower respiratory infections, leukemia and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). The U.S. Surgeon General has recommended paid leave for all working mothers in order to promote breastfeeding.

An infant’s interaction with a consistent, loving caregiver in their early months of life is vital to a child’s healthy development. Research shows that fathers play an essential role in promoting infant play and cognitive development and that fathers who take time off to spend with their new baby are more likely to be involved throughout their child’s life. It takes months for babies to develop secure attachments with their parents and sixteen weeks of paid parental leave would give families the time needed to cement these connections. Our current system increases the gap between high and low income families. High-income families are more likely to have jobs with paid leave while low-income families return to work earlier, often work multiple shifts with long hours and cannot afford quality childcare. Universal paid family leave would enable all parents, regardless of income, to care and nurture their baby during a time when the developmental tasks of bonding, attunement, and attachment are at their peak.

Paid parental leave is important for all families, but essential for parents of children with special needs. In one study, 41% of parents with children with special needs said they had not missed work at least once in the past year to care for their sick child even though they felt that they should have taken time off. I care for many children with special needs whose families are forced to choose between keeping their jobs and ensuring their child receives optimal medical care. One of my patients is a child who was born at 23 weeks weighing just over one pound. She spent the first 3.5 months in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, has been hospitalized ten times subsequent to her NICU discharge, is followed by eleven specialists and has had
numerous emergency and urgent care clinic visits. Her mother has been unable to keep a job because she has chosen to bring her child to her appointments and stay with her when she is sick and hospitalized. She is now on medical assistance and struggling to pay the bills. Paid parental leave would have given this smart, capable woman the ability to care for her sick child and then return as an enthusiastic, devoted employee.

Mothers who take paid parental leave have improved post-partum mental health which positively affects an infant’s emotional well-being and development. Studies of over 3300 women have shown that women who take at least 12 weeks of paid maternity leave have fewer depressive symptoms, major depression and overall improved physical and mental health. Mothers who take longer maternity leave score lower on the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale.13,14

The DC Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics enthusiastically supports the Universal Paid Parental Leave Act of 2015 because it would encourage breastfeeding, optimize infant health and development, enhance maternal physical and emotional well-being, improve parent-infant bonding and provide families the means to care for their sick children. We urge passage of Bill 21-415 to make Washington, DC’s families healthier and stronger.


4 Huang R, Yang M. Paid maternity leave and breastfeeding practice before and after California's implementation of the nation's first paid family leave program. Econ Hum Biol. 2015;16:45-59.


