Good Evening Chairman Mendelson and members of the DC Council. My name is Dr. Cicely Fadel. I am an MD/PhD trained board-certified pediatrician, a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and mother to an amazing one-year-old boy, Sami. I’m speaking in support of the Universal Paid Leave Act of 2015 on behalf of the DC Chapter of the AAP, which represents over 460 pediatricians in the District.

As a new mother and a pediatrician, this bill is of particular significance to me. When Sami was born, I used a combination of vacation and working from home to piece together paid leave. This time allowed me to recover physically and bond emotionally with Sami while establishing good child-care practices. The financial stability allowed me to continue paying rent while taking on new fiscal responsibilities, including food, clothing, hospital bills, car seats and cribs. While I consider myself among the “lucky ones,” the best option for a new parent should not be the use of vacation time. With waking every 2-3 hours for feeding and soothing – it is far from a vacation and the time available is inadequate. These Band-Aid solutions are simply not enough.

When caring for patients and families in Wards 4, 7, & 8, I recommend the AAP evidence-based guidelines on establishing breastfeeding, attending appointments and receiving immunizations. When I became a new mother, I realized how impractical the advice we give parents is without proper support. The situation only becomes more difficult the poorer you are. Now imagine if your infant has a severe health condition. Without paid leave, it becomes practically impossible. As I pursue a career in newborn intensive care, I have routinely witnessed parents make the heart wrenching decision between being at their baby’s bedside and returning to work so that they can afford the mounting hospital bills. This should not happen.

In my professional medical opinion, 16 weeks should be the minimum length of time to allow new parents to stay at home with their child. Around 3-4 months, children begin to laugh, reach for objects, and develop secure attachments with their parents. Research shows that increased parental involvement at this time helps improve brain development.

Paid family leave has clear demonstrated benefits to both the individual and society. The debate comes when considering how to pay for it. In reality this is money already being
spent in the form of increased utilization of public assistance\(^1\), decreased paternal involvement\(^2\), lower rates of breastfeeding\(^3\) and lower rates of immunization\(^4\). Redirecting this money towards the funding of paid leave would be an investment to safeguard the health and well being of the District’s children. The current system is inadequate and I know that we can do better. This bill is better.


\(^3\) 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.