State Advocacy Engagement on Paid Leave
Guidance for AAP Chapters

Overview
State efforts to expand access to paid leave have gained momentum in recent years. Paid leave policies include sick leave and family and medical leave for employees.

Generally, paid sick leave is made available in hourly intervals while family and medical leave offers an extended period of time off to support an employee’s ability to recuperate from an illness or injury, to provide care for a family member, or for the adoption or birth of a child. Currently, 40 million employees in the US lack access to paid sick leave. In addition, only 13% of employees in the US have access to paid family and medical leave.

A lack of access to paid leave programs is more prevalent among Hispanics, workers with less than a high school education, and workers with weekly incomes of less than $540. Access to paid leave is shown to be more prevalent among higher paying job sectors. Mothers who have access to state paid family and medical leave programs are less likely to rely on public assistance than those who live in states that do not offer such leave.

The 12 weeks of time available under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is unpaid and includes eligibility restrictions. To be eligible, employees must work for public agency, public or private school, or a private sector company with more than 50 employees who were employed at least 20 weeks during the current calendar year or preceding calendar year. Additionally, employees must work for the company for a minimum of 12 months, have at least 1,250 work hours in the prior 12 months, and work at a company location where at least 50 employees work within a 75-mile radius. As a result, about 60% of the US workforce is eligible to utilize the federal program.

The AAP supports 12 weeks of paid leave so employees can care for themselves or their families. Providing new parents with the opportunity to care for a child benefits everyone involved. Research demonstrates that when parents have paid family leave following the birth of a child, mothers breastfeed longer and parents are more likely to take children for immunizations and well-child care. The first weeks and months of a child's life are critical to development; because of the important role of parents in this early period, paid family leave can have effects that last throughout life. Paid leave is vital to supporting families formed through adoption, as well. And when children are seriously ill or suffer from chronic illness, having a parent by their side makes a significant difference to their recovery. At the same time, paid leave reduces parents' stress levels in these difficult circumstances. Yet, lacking paid leave, many parents must make the difficult decision to leave their sick children alone in the hospital in order to preserve their family's economic security.

Paid Leave Benefits Employers
Although claims are made that paid leave is harmful to businesses, research on existing state programs demonstrates that businesses can benefit from paid leave programs just as much as their employees can.

- In California, 87% of companies reported no increased costs as a result of employees utilizing the state’s paid family and medical leave program.
- In New Jersey, a study conducted by the state’s business and industry association found that employers have not experienced a loss in performance or profitability as a result of the state’s implementing its paid family and medical leave program.
- Employers in New Jersey reported that the state’s paid family and medical leave program led to reduced stress levels and increased morale among employees.
- Offering paid family and medical leave to employees can help companies reduce employee turnover and increase companies’ ability to attract talented workers.
State policymakers have an important role to play in this national discussion and advocate and stakeholders can engage with them to develop meaningful public policy.

**State Advocacy Engagement Options**

- Connect with family advocates. Parents and other family members lacking access to paid leave can share their powerful experiences and stories.
- Seek out existing coalitions in your state that are working to address access to paid leave. In collaboration with your chapter, the pediatricians’ voice boosts the efforts of family advocates and coalition partners, raising the medical, developmental, and behavioral benefits that flow from paid leave policies.
- Work with your partners to identify a legislator or legislators who will champion your cause. There may be a lawmaker who has a personal experience with the issue or who has already worked on related issues.
- Meet with business organizations. Share experiences from states that have successfully implemented paid family and medical leave, highlighting the benefits to families and dispelling myths about detrimental effects on businesses.

**Additional Resources**

- National Partnership for Women & Families | Paid Leave
- National Partnership for Women & Families | Paid Sick Leave
- National Conference of State Legislatures | Employee Leave
- AAP | Poverty and Child Health