



Report

STATE PAID LEAVE PROGRAMS COVER NEARLY ONE-THIRD OF WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Paid Leave

by Jessica Mason and Katherine Gallagher Robbins

This year, **three new state paid leave programs** start delivering benefits to workers – allowing people to spend time with their new babies, hold the hand of their spouse who is undergoing chemotherapy, and take the time they need to recover from surgery. They'll be able to do these things all while continuing to receive a paycheck. Three new programs all starting in one year marks a historic degree of growth – and demonstrates the momentum of state paid leave campaigns. In fact, since 2002, **14 states** have passed paid family and medical leave laws – 10 in the last decade alone.

As states embrace paid leave, workers and families are seeing real changes in their lives. **New National Partnership analysis finds that nationwide, nearly one-third of all private-sector workers in the labor force (32 percent) are eligible for paid leave under one of the 14 state programs that have been enacted.** These programs – which cover 93 percent of workers in these 14 states – have made 46.2 million workers across the country eligible for paid family and medical leave through their state program.

One in three U.S. workers is now eligible for a state paid leave program



Share of total U.S. workers who are in one of the 14 states with paid leave programs and meet their state's eligibility rules.

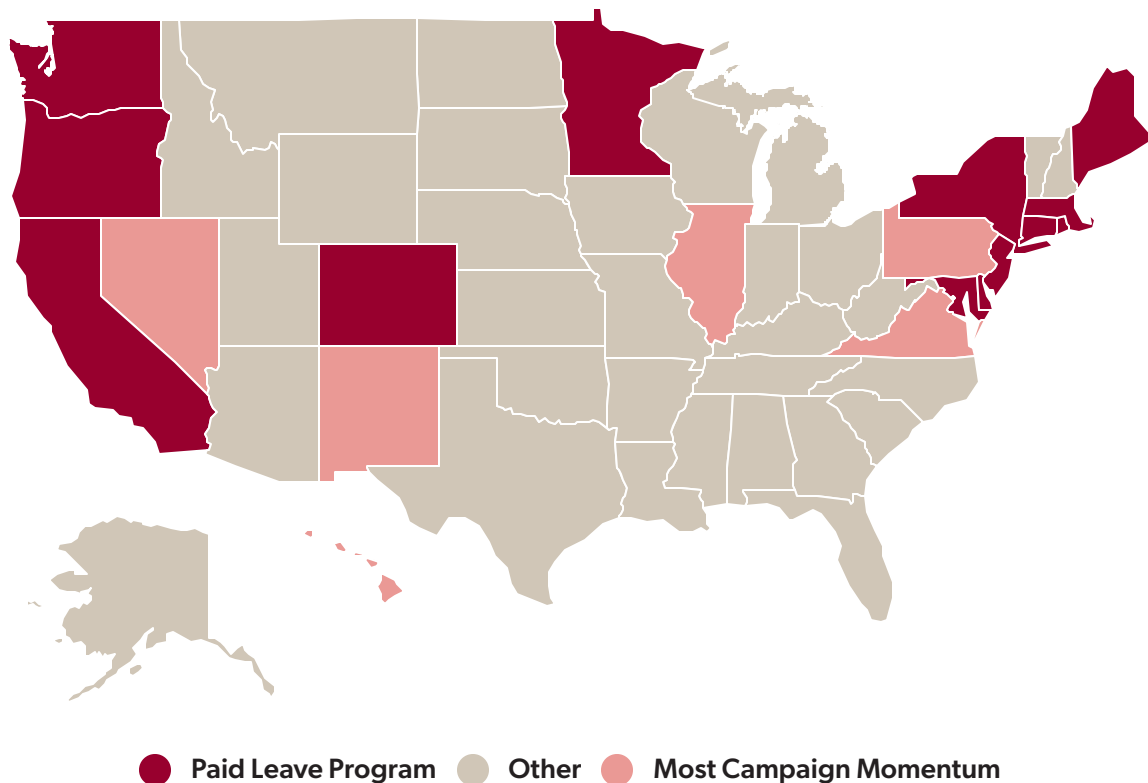
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And progress is poised to continue. Looking at the six states with the most momentum in paid family and medical leave campaigns – Hawai'i, Illinois, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Virginia – we find that **if similar programs were enacted in these**

states, 44 percent of private-sector workers nationwide would be eligible for state paid leave. That would result in paid leave access for an additional 16.6 million workers through state paid leave programs, bringing the total to 62.8 million workers nationwide.

States with existing paid leave programs or most campaign momentum



Source: National Partnership for Women & Families analysis as of February, 2026.

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The growing number of state paid leave programs not only helps workers afford to take time away from their jobs when their health and their families need it most, while still being able to pay the bills. It also offers clear evidence that in states across the nation, businesses of all sizes and in all kinds of industries have the expertise and capacity to successfully administer these essential benefits to their employees and enjoy the **benefits of paid leave.**

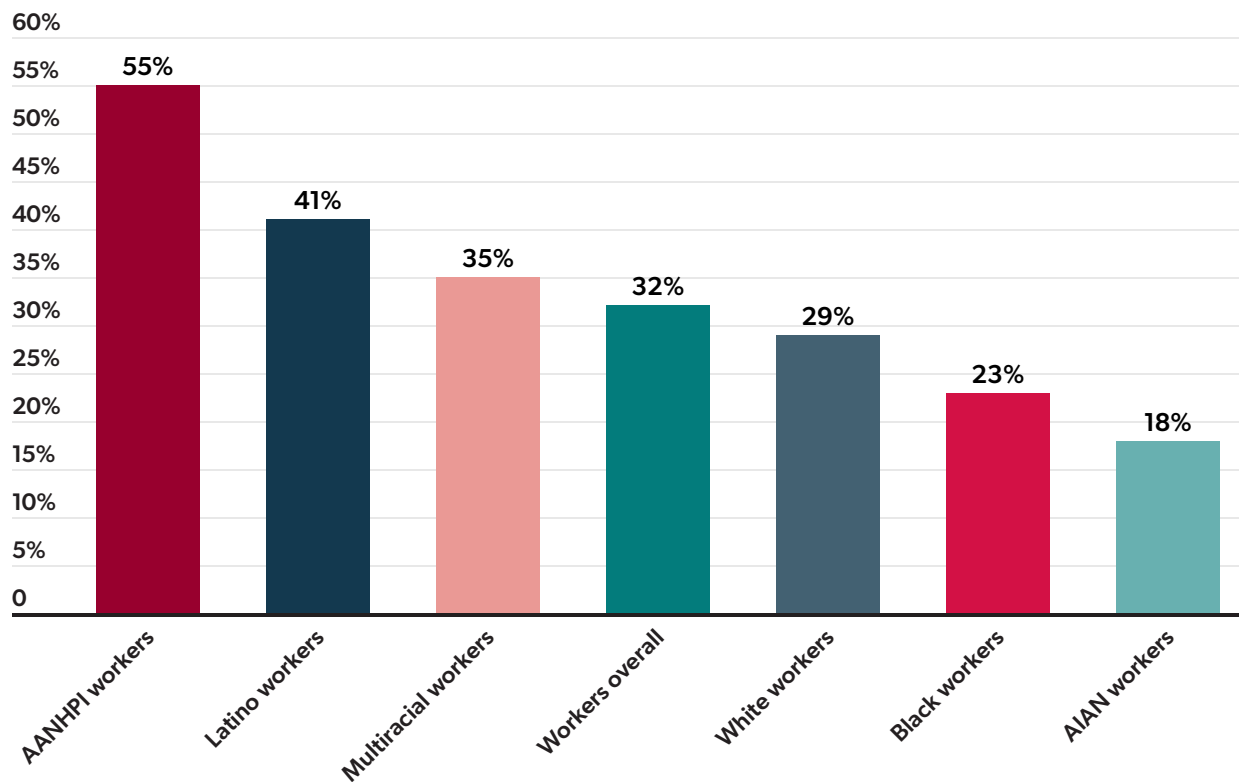
Current state paid leave programs support tens of millions of workers across the U.S.

More than 46 million workers in the United States are eligible to take paid leave under a state program when the need arises. That includes nearly a third of women (32 percent) and men (33 percent) workers across the nation, as well as close to one-third of parents (32 percent).

But the concentration of certain communities in different states means that access to these essential benefits is uneven. For example, we find that because they are more likely to live in states with paid leave laws, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) workers have especially benefitted from state progress on paid leave – more than half (55 percent) of this workforce has access to paid leave through their state program. Latino workers also particularly benefit because of where they live: more than four in 10 Latino workers (41 percent) in the U.S. have paid leave coverage from a state paid leave plan.

However, the lack of progress on paid leave in the 37 other states has disproportionately left out certain groups of workers who are more likely to live in states without paid leave programs. While overall 32 percent of the national workforce is eligible for state paid leave, rates are lower among American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) workers (18 percent), Black workers (23 percent), veterans (25 percent), low-wage workers (25 percent), disabled workers (27 percent), high school graduates (28 percent) and white workers (29 percent).

State paid leave programs are expanding access, but inequities remain



Share of each group's private-sector workforce in the U.S. that is eligible for a state paid leave program.

Source: National Partnership analysis of American Community Survey, 2019-2023. Racial groups exclude people who identify as Hispanic or Latino. Racial inequities are primarily, though not entirely, driven by the geographical concentration of different communities.

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All workers will at some point need paid leave, whether for their own health or to care for loved ones. But when access is not guaranteed, the workers least likely to have paid leave also tend to be those who are likely to face greater health and caregiving challenges and have fewer financial resources to fall back on. For example, access to employer-provided paid leave and other forms of paid time off is **lower among workers of color**, especially women of color, who also have their incomes undermined by **pay gaps and job discrimination**. And **workers of color** overall are more likely to experience harmful **social determinants of health**, such as physically demanding jobs and toxic environmental exposures. Access is also lower among **disabled workers**, who may need leave to manage their health and succeed at their jobs and are more likely to be

caregivers than nondisabled workers, while also facing wage gaps. Low-wage workers, who are especially likely to lack the financial resources to be able to take unpaid leave, also have **lower rates of access** to paid leave.

State paid leave programs cover nearly one-third of U.S. workers

	Total number of private-sector workers	Share of total U.S. private-sector labor force eligible for state paid leave
Total	46,211,700	32%
Men	25,278,200	33%
Women	20,933,500	32%
American Indian/Alaska Native	98,700	18%
Asian American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	5,149,500	55%
Black	3,606,800	23%
Latino	11,264,900	41%
Multiracial	1,660,000	35%
White	24,160,500	29%
Disabled	2,646,400	27%
Nondisabled	43,565,300	33%
Parents	14,229,600	32%
Veterans	1,468,600	25%
Non veterans	44,645,700	33%
Low-wage	8,974,600	25%
Less than high school	4,473,800	32%
High school graduates	10,239,300	28%
Some college	8,951,800	29%
Associate's degree	3,806,100	30%
Bachelor's degree	11,852,600	37%
Graduate degree	6,888,000	41%

Source: Authors' calculations using American Community Survey 2019-2023. Racial groups exclude people who identify as Hispanic or Latino. Low-wage workers are paid less than \$15/hour on average. Figures are for all 14 enacted state paid leave programs regardless of current benefit status. See methods note for additional details.

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Across the 14 states with paid leave programs, more than nine in 10 workers are eligible for leave

Across the 14 states with paid leave programs, the rules for being eligible to take leave vary, thus eligibility ranges from 76 percent of workers in Delaware to 97 percent in California and Oregon. Across all the states with programs, 93 percent of private-sector workers are eligible for paid leave.

We generally find high levels of eligibility across communities, though rates are slightly lower among Black (89 percent) and AIAN workers (91 percent), disabled workers (87 percent), low-wage workers (88 percent), and workers without a high school degree (88 percent), compared to workers overall.

Men workers are slightly more likely to be eligible than women workers (94 percent, compared to 92 percent). Working parents (95 percent), AANHPI workers (95 percent), and workers with graduate degrees (96 percent) have the highest eligibility rates.

States with paid leave programs cover 93 percent of their workforce

	Total number of private-sector workers	Share of the group's private-sector labor force in the 14 states with paid leave programs
Total	46,211,700	93%
Men	25,278,200	94%
Women	20,933,500	92%
American Indian/Alaska Native	98,700	91%
Asian American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	5,149,500	95%
Black	3,606,800	89%
Latino	11,264,900	94%
Multiracial	1,660,000	92%
White	24,160,500	93%
Disabled	2,646,400	87%
Nondisabled	43,565,300	93%
Parents	14,229,600	95%
Veterans	1,468,600	94%
Non veterans	44,645,700	93%
Low-wage	8,974,600	88%
Less than high school	4,473,800	88%
High school graduates	10,239,300	92%
Some college	8,951,800	92%
Associate's degree	3,806,100	94%
Bachelor's degree	11,852,600	95%
Graduate degree	6,888,000	96%

Source: Authors' calculations using American Community Survey 2019-2023. Racial groups exclude people who identify as Hispanic or Latino. Low-wage workers are paid less than \$15/hour on average. Figures are for all 14 states with enacted paid leave programs regardless of current benefit status. See methods note for additional details.

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Enacting new programs in the six states with the most campaign momentum would dramatically improve paid leave access across the country

If all six states with the most campaign momentum enacted programs with the same reach as current state programs, we estimate that 62.8 million workers in the U.S. would have access to a state paid leave program. These estimates highlight the potential for growth in state paid leave programs and the strong momentum across the country.

State paid leave programs would cover nearly 63 million workers if the campaigns with the most momentum became law

	Total number of private-sector workers	Share of the group's private-sector labor force in the U.S.
Total	62,772,600	44%
Men	34,105,900	44%
Women	28,666,700	44%
American Indian/Alaska Native	162,400	30%
Asian American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander	6,364,400	68%
Black	5,441,100	34%
Latino	13,872,000	51%
Multiracial	2,252,700	47%
White	34,346,600	41%
Disabled	3,805,300	38%
Parents	19,232,200	43%
Veterans	2,179,800	37%

Source: Authors' calculations using American Community Survey 2019-2023. Racial groups exclude people who identify as Hispanic or Latino. See methods note for additional details. Figures include estimates for the 14 current state paid leave programs as well as the states with the six most active campaigns.

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State progress on paid leave is changing the face of workplace benefits

From an employer perspective, growing momentum for state paid leave in recent years has changed the face of workplace benefits in two critical ways. First, states with paid leave programs are likely driving increased paid leave coverage beyond their own borders. For example, **recent research** on state and local paid sick leave laws finds that multistate employers respond to these laws by also providing paid sick leave to their workers in places without this requirement, raising the floor for workers across the board. The greater the share of the employer's workforce that is covered by paid sick leave laws, the more likely they are to expand benefits, making it likely that the more states that have paid family and medical leave, the greater the impact on workers in other states.

Second, as more states have set up programs, more employers of all sizes now have experience with paid family and medical leave, whether by taking advantage of the state program to administer benefits – which can **especially help small employers** with fewer HR resources – or by working with benefits providers. And of course some employers in every state in the country without a paid leave program offer paid leave benefits, including **employers of all sizes** who offer generous, comprehensive benefits. This broad growth makes a compelling case for this labor standard and offers clear evidence of growing administrative capacity across all kinds of businesses.

In addition to paid leave for private sector workers, access for public servants has also grown. The **vast majority of states** offer at least some paid parental leave to state government workers. **Sixteen states** provide paid parental leave for teachers, including several in the South. Federal workers won access to **paid parental leave** in 2019.

States with existing paid family and medical leave programs have expanded their programs over the years to cover **more workers** and **more families**, and even more states continue to work toward statewide paid family and medical leave programs. For example, the Virginia legislature has passed a paid family and medical leave law twice, but then-Governor Youngkin **vetoed** the bills. Similarly, **New Mexico** nearly passed a paid family and medical leave program in 2024 and 2025, but fell short by only a few votes each time. National Partnership research shows that lawmakers in current sessions have introduced dozens of bills related to paid family and medical leave

programs. These programs also underscore growing momentum for paid leave across a wide range of workplaces.

Conclusion

Three-quarters of Americans say it's important that Congress create a national paid leave program which covers medical leave, parental leave and family caregiving responsibilities, and ensures workers are paid when they are on leave. But in the meantime, states will continue to lead the way on paid leave progress, offering clear evidence that comprehensive paid leave **supports businesses, workers and their loved ones**.

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Methods note: Figures are authors' analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year data 2019-2023 via IPUMS. Throughout this analysis "paid leave" refers to paid family and medical leave programs. Eligible workforce figures are for the private-sector workforce; state paid leave programs do not cover federal workers and coverage of state and local government employees varies. For paid leave program states, figures are an estimate of workers who meet eligibility thresholds, not of the number of workers who experience a qualifying health or caregiving condition in a given year. Unless otherwise noted, figures throughout the analysis include all states that have enacted paid leave, including those that are not yet providing benefits. Maryland's paid leave benefits will commence in **2028**. D.C. is included as one of the 14 states in this analysis. Eligibility definitions were determined based on the closest reasonable fit between available ACS categories and statute text for each paid leave program state. See National Partnership for Women and Families *State Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Laws* for details on state paid leave programs. While workers may work in states they do not live in, these estimates are based on residency data. Note that additional workers may be eligible to receive paid leave through their employers.

We define parents for the purpose of this analysis as parents whose minor children live with them. Racial groups exclude Hispanic and Latino workers who are analyzed

separately. Low-wage workers in this analysis are those with average hourly wages under \$15. People are identified as having a disability in this analysis if they responded that they have difficulty in one or more of the following realms: vision, hearing, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living. People may have multiple disabilities. This is a limited definition of disability that excludes a portion of disabled people. For more information on how disability is measured in the American Community Survey please see the U.S. Census Bureau’s report [How Disability Data are Collected from The American Community Survey](#).

We selected the states with the “most campaign momentum” based on their activity around comprehensive PFML legislation (such as bill introduction and committee hearings), the presence of other paid leave policies in the state (such as paid sick days or parental leave for state employees) and media attention to the campaign or legislation. Estimates for states with campaign momentum are based on the population-weighted eligibility across all current program states. Across the existing states with paid leave programs, 93.1 percent of workers are eligible. This analysis applies this estimate across the board to different demographic groups for the states with the “most campaign momentum.”

Findings about legislation introduced in states are based on National Partnership legislative tracking of current state sessions.

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