



## **Statement for the Record**

### **Hearing: Examining Innovative Approaches to Paid Leave**

House Education and Workforce Committee

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

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Submitted by Patriot Voices:

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Patriot Voices appreciates the Subcommittee on Workforce Protections' attention to paid leave and commends the Subcommittee—especially Representative Ryan Mackenzie—for advancing a serious discussion on how to support working families after the birth or adoption of a child. We also commend the bipartisan House Paid Family Leave Working Group—particularly its Co-Chairs, Representatives Stephanie Bice and Chrissy Houlahan—for collaborating on legislation that advances a pro-family, pro-work priority central to household stability and the nation's long-term strength.

Strong families are the foundation of a strong society. Yet too many parents face a difficult tradeoff between caring for a new child and maintaining financial stability. Today, only 27% of civilian workers have access to employer-provided paid family leave, and among the lowest 10 percent of earners, just 5% do. A Department of Labor survey found that about 23% of women who took leave for a new baby returned to work within 2 weeks. Fathers often returned even sooner—or had no leave at all. Time together after the birth or adoption of a child gives families the best chance to recover, bond, and return to work with stability.

We are encouraged that this hearing is considering innovative approaches to paid leave, including the Bipartisan Working Group's proposals: the **Paid Family Leave Public-Private Partnership Act**, which would encourage states to design solutions suited to their own economies, and the **Interstate Paid Leave Action Network (I-PLAN) Act**, which would help coordinate and harmonize paid leave across states with existing plans. Together, these approaches respond to workforce needs while respecting state priorities and local values—consistent with conservative principles and America's tradition of state-led innovation. States are often best positioned to pilot reforms, learn from one another, and refine programs over time based on what works for families and employers.

This issue also has long-term national implications. U.S. fertility has fallen to about 1.6 births per woman, well below the roughly 2.1 replacement level. Yet surveys show Americans' ideal family size averages 2.7 children—a reminder of the gap between what many families hope for and what they feel they can afford. When the costs of raising children rise, families delay or forgo having them. Over time, that reduces the future workforce, constrains economic growth, and strains programs that depend on a strong base of future taxpayers. A society that values family formation should ensure its policies do not unintentionally discourage it.

Paid leave is also linked to outcomes that strengthen self-sufficiency. Nearly half of mothers in households earning under \$30,000 rely on public assistance after a birth. Access to paid leave reduces the likelihood that mothers will need public assistance or food stamps and increases the likelihood they remain in the workforce years later. That means greater independence for families and less long-term strain on safety-net programs.

Children benefit as well. Research shows that early parental bonding supports long-term mental health and resilience. Fathers who spend time with newborns are more engaged in childrearing over time, reinforcing family stability. Paid leave is associated with lower infant and maternal hospitalizations, lower infant mortality, and lower rates of maternal depression. These are outcomes that strengthen families and communities.

Employers also benefit from a stable and committed workforce. Access to paid leave is associated with higher morale, greater retention, and improved productivity. In a competitive labor market, family-friendly benefits help businesses attract and keep good workers.

Public support for paid leave is broad and bipartisan, including strong support among Republicans and households with children. Americans understand that supporting families and supporting work are not competing goals. While Patriot Voices focuses in this statement on parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child, we are encouraged that many state paid-leave frameworks also address other common needs, including temporary medical leave and caregiving leave—tools that help families stay stable and connected to work when illness or caregiving needs arise.

The path forward should strengthen families and reinforce the value of work. Empowering states to develop their own paid leave frameworks allows solutions to be tested and refined without a one-size-fits-all federal mandate. It encourages accountability closer to the people and allows policies to reflect local needs and priorities.

When families are strong, the nation is strong. Policies that enable families to welcome a new child—or weather illness or caregiving needs—while remaining connected to the workforce reinforce responsibility, stability, and opportunity. Thoughtful, state-driven approaches can help ensure American families are not penalized for welcoming the next generation. That is a goal worthy of bipartisan support and careful action.