



**Statement for the Record
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**Leading by Example: The Need for Comprehensive Paid Leave
for the Federal Workforce and Beyond**

**House Oversight and Reform Committee
June 24, 2021**

Chairwoman Maloney and Ranking Member Comer, on behalf of the National Treasury Employees Union, which represents approximately 150,000 federal employees across 34 federal agencies, I want to thank you for holding today's hearing on the importance of paid family leave for federal employees. As noted in the Hamilton Project's 2021 policy paper *A Proposal for a Federal Paid Parental and Medical Leave Program*, "[t]here is almost universal agreement in the United States that workers should have access to wage replacement during a work disruption due to their own or a family member's serious illness or the arrival of a child." In addition, in the 2017 American Enterprise Institute-Brookings Working Group on Paid Family Leave report, *Paid Family and Medical Leave – An Issue Whose Time Has Come*, the group found that "polls show overwhelming public support for paid family and medical leave. Support of the concept is bipartisan, with almost 71% of Republicans and 83% of Democrats in favor of a paid leave policy."

As you know Chairwoman Maloney, NTEU has worked with you since 2003 to secure paid leave for federal employees. When this movement began, we wanted the federal government to be a leader and model employer in providing this benefit to employees. Now, federal agencies lag far behind the public and private sector and are finding it increasingly difficult to attract younger workers, who see this benefit as a crucial part of their compensation. The provision in the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that provided paid parental leave for federal employees is an incredible step forward, but many employees also struggle to care for sick parents or other family members who are critically ill. I hope that we can continue to work together to build on the momentum of this new paid parental leave and expand it to provide paid leave, or paid family leave, that is available for all situations covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act.

California became the first state to offer paid family leave in 2004, shortly after your first paid leave bill was introduced. New Jersey began its paid family leave program in 2009. As of early 2021, paid family leave is available in New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Washington state. Three others - Connecticut, Colorado, and Oregon - have passed legislation and are in the process of implementing paid family leave programs. Here in Washington, DC, the White House has called for paid leave for all Americans, and there are proposals by several Members of Congress calling for universal paid family leave. This pandemic has brought into focus how difficult it is for us to balance the demands of work and family. The time to act on paid family leave is now.

I want to share with you again some stories from our members that illustrate how necessary paid family leave is to federal employees:

We heard from a federal employee and single parent whose daughter was rushed to the hospital with an urgent heart condition that required emergency surgery and extensive rehabilitation and recovery: “With 12 weeks of paid leave to care for my minor child I would have been able to reduce the stress of leave without pay charges, reduction in pay, repaying borrowed leave and repaying a cash debt owed. I would have reduced my financial burden and the mental stress it caused. This would have allowed me to focus solely on the health and recovery of my daughter.”

We heard from a federal employee who is taking care of her elderly, widowed mother with Alzheimer’s: “She has multiple doctor appointments and recurring medical issues, so I have used almost all of my annual and sick leave. I just checked the other day, and I’m down to 5.5 hours of sick leave. After 29 years of accumulating sick leave, that’s all I have left. My only other option is FMLA, but that is unpaid. Right now I’m paying for adult day care and I’m paying another aide to help out, and I cannot afford to take unpaid leave. That is just not an option. I’ve already used up my savings and I’m trying to get out of debt. Having 12 weeks of paid leave would be life-changing for me and for many of my coworkers. Taking care of an elderly parent shouldn’t be this hard. I shouldn’t have to choose between helping my mom and earning a paycheck.”

We heard from a federal employee whose mother died of cancer: “Paid leave would have allowed me to stay home to care for my ailing mom. Instead, I was forced to send her off to Adult Day Care to sit uncomfortable in a chair until I could get her after work. She has since passed on, but this weighs on my heart almost daily.”

We heard from a federal employee whose father, a Vietnam veteran, was in a hospice facility eight hours from her home: “I had already used up all of my sick and annual leave caring for my father. Unpaid leave was not an option for me, so I drove, back and forth, on weekends, and it was very expensive. Having paid leave would have allowed me to be there with him in his final days without worrying about losing income and the extra expenses that I incurred for the travel every weekend. Paid family leave would have allowed me to spend some consistent time with him without feeling like I was always leaving him alone, never knowing if this will be the last time I see him.” Her father died the day before she shared this with us. She was not able to get to the facility in time to be with him in his last hours.

These stories are just a small sample of those we received from our members that illustrate why it is so important that the government provide its employees with this benefit. In addition to providing leave for a new child, paid family leave could be used to care for the employee's spouse, child or parent with a serious health condition. It could be used to care for the employee's own serious health condition. And it could be used if an urgent need arises because the employee's spouse, child or parent is on covered active duty in the Armed Forces.

Paid family leave would help our federal government recruit and retain dedicated and talented workers. It has been shown to lead to increased productivity, better morale and reduced absenteeism. Providing paid family leave to federal employees is a win for both the employees and the government. Employees would be allowed time to take care of themselves or a family member with a serious health condition, and agencies would not have to cover the costs of recruiting and training new employees and would be better able to compete with the private sector and those forward-looking states for talented individuals. We could save millions in turnover costs with a paid family leave policy. We look forward to passage of H.R. 564 and pledge to help in whatever way necessary to achieve that.