



Washington State National Organization for Women

Family Leave Insurance

Washington State National Organization for Women (NOW) supports family leave insurance legislation. Juggling the demands of work and family can be a challenge even in routine times. When a baby is born, when a spouse or child is hospitalized, when a parent is terminally ill, the routine juggling doesn't work. In times like these, workers need time off, and they need to be able to take that time without risking losing their jobs or losing their family's economic security. A growing movement is determined to bring Family Leave Insurance to Washington state, to give workers the extra support they need to both care and provide for their families.

Family leave insurance is gaining momentum nationwide to extend job protections and provide partial wage replacement to workers on family and medical leave. Current federal law provides for up to 12 weeks of *unpaid* leave for workers caring for newborn or newly adopted children, a seriously ill family member, or for their own serious medical condition. But this law only applies to a little over half of the workforce – to people who have worked at least one year for public employers or for companies with 50 or more employees. According to a major national study, 45% of workers are not covered by the job protections of the FMLA. In Washington State, this amounts to 1.3 million workers. In addition, many workers cannot afford to take leave without pay, even when they are eligible. In Washington in 1999 alone, an estimated 24,000 workers needed family or medical leave and were eligible under the FMLA, but could not take leave because they couldn't afford it.

Washington NOW is a member of a coalition including members of labor, women's, children's, senior, health, church, and other organizations is proposing family leave insurance for Washington workers. The plan would provide up to five weeks of partial wage replacement for workers on family or medical leave, and extend job protections to workers of any size company. The most likely method of funding would be through a payroll deduction of about one cent an hour worked – or about \$21 per year for a full time worker – paid by workers and matched by their employers.

Five states, including California and New Jersey, already provide paid maternity and medical leave to all workers in their state under universal temporary disability insurance programs. These states are considering expanding their temporary disability programs to cover other kinds of family leave. At least 18 states have considered legislation over the past year to enact family leave insurance programs.