

Paid Parental Leave After Birth

Introduction

Currently, maternity, and paternity leave in the U.S. is governed by the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, also known as FMLA; new parents can take up to 12 weeks off from work for the birth or adoption of a child.

Issue

Single mothers make up 80% of single-parent families in the United States, with nearly one third of these families living in poverty. According to the 2019 US Census Bureau, 1 in 4 children in a single family are under the age of 18 (~15.7 million). Unpaid maternity aid to such women is of no help at all. If parents are able to take time off, it is often unpaid. To resume work, parents are forced to seek childcare and leave their children with people with whom they are unfamiliar. For single mothers specifically, in the states of Massachusetts, California and Oregon, mothers would need to pay more than half of their income in order to afford day care for their infants and toddlers. Many parents are unable to extend their Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) without risk of losing their jobs. Additionally, employees only qualify for FMLA if they have worked at their job for at least 1,250 hours.

Importance

The purpose of this policy brief is to advocate for parental leave from 12 weeks to 6 months of paid leave and if necessary 6 months of unpaid leave without fear of losing one's job. The first 6 to 9 months of life are crucial to developing a bond between the parent and child. According to the CDC, a child from 0-6 months of age goes through various stages of development regarding social, emotional, communication, cognitive, and physical development, therefore parental presence throughout these milestones during the early phase of life should be considered in determining the length of parental leave.

Impact

The first few months, birth until 6 months, are a critical time for both the new parent and child, as the parents learn to respond to the child's needs. There is strong evidence that maternal leave aids in mother-infant bonding and decreasing the risk of postpartum depression. Postpartum depression should be prevented if possible because it may become a hindrance and negatively impact the mother and infant's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Evidence has shown that without a good initial bond contributes to children who grow up to be happy, independent and resilient adults.

Infancy is a very crucial part of brain development; 90% of the child's brain has reach the adult size. Considering this rapid brain growth, the repeated interactions a baby has with its parents and caregiver enables wiring of connections and pathways in the brain that help form memories and relationships as well as learning and logic development. The absence of these human experiences will disable the formation of this pathways. Studies have shown that children growing up with very minimal human contact exhibited a severe lack of language and emotional development. While we cannot ignore that there may be a genetic disposition, we cannot deny the fact that a lack of or inconsistent bonding can have detrimental effects.

Recommendations

According to Employment Development Department in the state of California, a pregnant mother can receive up to 4 weeks of Disability Insurance (DI) benefits for a normal pregnancy before the expected due date. She can also receive up to 6 weeks (for normal delivery) or eight weeks (for Cesarean section) of DI benefits after the delivery. A new mom or parent is eligible to receive Paid Family leave (PFL) if they have paid into State Disability Insurance (known as CASDI) in the past 5 to 18 months. Also, they have not taken the maximum 8 weeks of PFL in the past 12 months.

We propose that new parents should be eligible to receive a Paid Family leave (PFL) of 6 months instead of 6 to 8 weeks in the state of California. This leave should be independent of their previous history of taking PFL in the past 12 months. Maternity or paternity leave should fall in completely different category than PFL and should be exclusively for new mom/or dad. We recommend that the parents should have job security when the PFL is over. Parents should not have an added stress of being out of job as a result of raising a family. It is crucial for new parents and the child to develop proper bonding. First year is very important not only in child's development but also in becoming a responsible new mother.

Sources:

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