



2301 21st Ave. South, Suite 355, Nashville, TN 37212 | t: 615.915.2417 | info@abetterbalance.org | abetterbalance.org

**Public Comment Submitted to the Louisiana HR 118 Task Force
December 9, 2021**

Submitted by: Feroza Freeland, Policy Manager of the Southern Office at A Better Balance

A Better Balance is a non-profit organization that advances justice for workers. For the past 15 years, our organization has played a leading role in crafting and implementing paid family & medical leave policies at the local, state, and national levels. Our regional Southern Office serves families across the South, including in Louisiana. Through our legal helpline, we hear from countless workers who lack access to paid leave and are faced with heart-wrenching choices between caring for themselves and their loved ones and paying their bills.

A Better Balance strongly supports a robust, inclusive paid family & medical leave program for all Louisiana workers. We applaud the creation of this task force, and we thank each member for your dedication to studying this important issue.

Currently, most working families in Louisiana do not have access to paid family & medical leave. While the Family & Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides unpaid time off, many workers are not covered, and even those who are eligible often cannot afford to take weeks of leave without pay. Just over 1 in 5 workers in the South have access to paid family leave,¹ and low-wage workers and people of color are even less likely to have this critical protection.² And fewer than 1 in 3 workers in the region receive short-term disability insurance through their employers, leaving them vulnerable when they need time off to address their own serious health needs.³

Paid family & medical leave improves the health and economic security of families while also benefitting businesses and the larger economy.

Research shows that this policy can improve parental bonding, breastfeeding rates, maternal health, vaccination rates, and other health outcomes for children.⁴ By supporting the health of mothers and babies, this policy can also help address Louisiana's alarming racial disparities in

¹ National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, Mar. 2021, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Table 33 (2021), <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2021/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2021.pdf>.

² National Partnership for Women and Families, *Paid Family and Medical Leave: A Racial Justice Issue- and Opportunity*, (2018), p. 5, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>

³ Ibid, Table 17.

⁴ *The Health and Socio-Economic Benefits of Paid Parental Leave and Louisville Benchmarks*, Louisville Department of Public Health & Wellness (2019), https://louisvilleky.gov/sites/default/files/health_and_wellness/2019paidparentalleave_peer_cities.pdf.



2301 21st Ave. South, Suite 355, Nashville, TN 37212 | t: 615.915.2417 | info@abetterbalance.org | abetterbalance.org

maternal and infant mortality. Paid leave also promotes at-home caregiving for ill family members, which helps reduce the strain on our overburdened healthcare system.

By keeping workers with caregiving needs attached to the workforce, this policy promotes economic security and can help decrease the use of public assistance, creating taxpayer savings.⁵ Finally, paid family leave has been shown to increase employee retention and lower turnover.⁶ It also helps boost productivity and employee morale. The vast majority of employers surveyed in one state reported that paid family leave had either a positive or neutral effect on profitability, productivity, and employee morale.⁷

Based on our experiences crafting similar programs across the country, a robust paid family & medical leave program in Louisiana should include the following:

1. At least 12 weeks of paid leave for all workers, including part-time, seasonal, and domestic workers, and the opportunity for independent contractors to opt in;
2. Paid leave to care for a new child (whether by birth, adoption, or foster care), to care for a loved one who is seriously ill, to recover from one's own serious illness, and to address needs related to a military deployment;
3. An inclusive definition of "family member" that accurately reflects today's families and builds on the FMLA definition by also covering unmarried partners, adult children, siblings, grandparents & grandchildren, extended family members, and other close loved ones;
4. A wage replacement rate high enough to ensure all workers can afford to take the leave they need, especially lower-income workers who need as much of their income as possible to pay their family bills;
5. A guarantee that all workers have the right to return to work following leave and will not be punished or fired for taking leave.

In conclusion, we urge you to move forward with strong recommendations to implement a robust, inclusive paid family & medical leave program for all Louisiana workers. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this comment. Please contact Feroza Freeland at ffreeland@abetterbalance.org if you have further questions or if we can help support your work in any way.

⁵ Linda Houser and Thomas P. Vartanian, "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public, Rutgers Center for Women and Work (Jan. 2012), <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/other/pay-matters.pdf>.

⁶ Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman, *Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California*, (2011), p. 8, <http://cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>.

⁷ *Ibid.*