

FAMILY VALUES AGENDA: PAID FAMILY LEAVE, PAID SICK LEAVE, PAID VACATION

In the United States, millions of employees lack access to paid time off for vacation, illness, or care of a family member. Additionally, **40 percent of American workers lack access to even the basic job protections provided by the Family Medical Leave Act** because they work for an employer with fewer than 50 employees. This means they are one illness, injury, or birth of a child away from losing their jobs. Millions of workers have to choose between a paycheck and taking their child to the doctor, between buying groceries for the week and taking a day off to relax and recharge.

Senator Sanders' Guaranteed Paid Vacation Act

Senator Sanders' Guaranteed Paid Vacation Act would provide 10 days of paid vacation for employees who have worked for an employer for at least one year. This legislation would make sure workers have access to minimum vacation benefits that most companies already offer to their white-collar, high-salary workers. The Act would apply to employers with at least 15 employees.

The United States is the only advanced economy that does not provide its workers with some type of paid vacation time. Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and many countries in Europe guarantee their workers at least 10 days of paid vacation, while other countries, including France, Austria, and Belgium, provide far more generous benefits.

Importance of Paid Vacation

Lack of paid time off has a significant negative impact on not only the employee, but the society as a whole. Last year, a study by Oxford Economics found benefits of taking time off from work include **higher productivity, greater employee retention, increased workplace morale, and significant health benefits.**

The study also found that when people take time off, the economy benefits. For example, if employees who already get time off took the full amount they were eligible for, **the economy would benefit from more than \$160 billion in total business sales, \$21 billion in tax revenues, and 1.2 million additional jobs** would be supported in industries like retail and manufacturing.

The FAMILY Act to Provide Universal Paid Family and Medical Leave

Workers in the United States should have at least 12 weeks of universal paid family and medical leave. The FAMILY Act introduced by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand does just that. This bill, which Sen. Sanders is co-sponsoring, allows mothers and fathers to receive 12 weeks of paid family leave to care for a baby. It also allows workers to take the same amount of paid time off if they are diagnosed with cancer or have other serious medical conditions or to take care of family members who are seriously ill.

The Healthy Families Act to Provide Paid Sick Leave

Workers should also be guaranteed at least seven paid sick days. The Healthy Families Act introduced by Sen. Murray accomplishes this goal by providing workers with up to seven days of paid sick leave per year to be used for short-term illness, routine medical care, or care for a sick family member. Under this legislation, which Sen. Sanders is co-sponsoring, paid sick leave would be earned by workers at a rate of one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked. The Act would also allow employers to require employees to provide documentation supporting any request for leave longer than three consecutive days.

An International Comparison: America is Getting Left Behind

The United States is the only advanced economy that does not guarantee its workers some form of paid family leave, paid sick time, or paid vacation time. For example, Germany provides workers with up to 6 months of leave to care for a close relative. Many countries also guarantee their workers leave specifically for the birth or adoption of a child. Canada, France, Germany, Australia all guarantee their workers more than 20 weeks of leave, which may be taken by either parent.

Disparities in Access to Paid Leave

There are significant disparities among the types of workers who have access to paid sick time and paid vacation time. For example, only **38 percent of Latino workers have access to paid sick time compared with 60 percent of white workers**, according to a 2012 survey by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS).

According the same BLS survey, **67 percent of white male workers over 18 receive paid vacation, compared with 58 percent of white women and just 40 percent of African American men.**

There are also significant disparities in the amount of paid leave a worker receives based on occupation and earnings. Over **77 percent** of management, business, and financial operations workers have access to paid leave compared with just **36 percent** of construction workers.

Additionally, only **50 percent of employees who earn \$540 per week**, an amount well above the earnings of an individual working 40 hours per week at minimum wage, have access to paid leave, compared with **83 percent** of workers earning more than \$1,200 per week.

Solution: The Guaranteed Paid Vacation Act, the FAMILY Act & the Healthy Families Act

We must level the playing field so all American workers have access to paid family leave, sick time, and vacation time. This is accomplished through three important pieces of legislation before the Senate: 1) Senator Gillibrand's FAMILY Act to provide paid family leave, 2) Senator Murray's Healthy Families Act to provide paid sick time, and Senator Sanders' Guaranteed Paid Vacation Act to provide paid vacation time to all workers. Together, these important legislative proposals will give American workers the time they need to care for themselves and their families, while making them more productive during their time at work and boosting the American economy.