

INTRODUCTION

Years of campaigning for paid family and medical leave (PFML) at the state level have shown that business support is an absolutely critical component to getting paid leave legislation over the finish line. While the data clearly show that paid leave is good for business, opposition from the state Chamber of Commerce and other groups such as the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) has killed or weakened paid leave legislation in many states. If the state Chamber of Commerce, NFIB, or other organized business lobby groups are not actively working against your bill, they will likely mobilize against it as the prospects of passing it look more promising.

The majority of businesses in your state, however, likely would want and need paid family and medical leave if they knew the benefits and learned about how most state-level paid leave programs work. If the Chamber and other organized business lobby groups oppose it, legislators will need to be able to point to other specific examples of support from the business community. **Your job is to find the most compelling stories and spokespeople** from the companies and sectors that key lawmakers most care about, and to **cultivate the business owners, executives and corporate government affairs leaders to be your messengers. This guide will show you how.**

The best time to start organizing the business community in support of your bill is years before you anticipate a vote since it takes a long time to build relationships and trust, and to cultivate business owners and CEOs. **The second-best time to start is right now!**

Whether you're new to business organizing or already have robust relationships in place, we designed this playbook to be a user-friendly how-to guide for business organizing at the state level - with overall framework, tips, how-tos, and many template materials that advocates can adapt to their own purposes.

We created this playbook using insights from successful paid leave campaigns in various states and from efforts to organize hundreds of national businesses, including Fortune 500 companies, to support federal paid leave. You can customize the materials to fit your needs. Each state has its own unique landscape, needs, challenges and opportunities. While something may be presented as a best practice here, there is no "one size fits all." Utilize your own landscape analysis to figure out the best approach in your state.



FRAMEWORK AND TIPS

1 **Business organizing is just organizing.** Good business organizing follows the same principles and practices of all other organizing. Businesses are made of people. Find your champions - the small business owner, the HR leader, the CEO, whoever is most passionate about paid leave. Organize people where they're at. Ask questions and learn their motivations. Use simple activations to bring them in the door and then bring them up the leadership/engagement ladder.

2 **Follow the relationships.** The best way to make inroads into the business community in your state is to follow your existing relationships. Ask people who know and trust you to introduce you to others. An introduction is always better than cold outreach. Start wherever you have relationships so you can get business validators on board.

3 **Tier your outreach.** Businesses want to know that other businesses support your bill. Having three recognizable businesses engaging on your bill will unlock participation from others. Don't reach out to everyone all at once – get a few good businesses on board first and then mention those names in your second wave of outreach. Having even a few good validators makes it much easier to convince others to act.

4 **Expect to spend time educating your key contacts within businesses about how paid leave programs work and listening/responding to their concerns with evidence-based information.** Paid leave may or may not be an issue businesses have considered or a benefit they are currently offering, but businesses new to the issue in states that have not already passed paid leave will almost certainly know nothing about how public policies are structured or funded, or how they interface with existing systems and practices. They may also know very little about the needs of employees with respect to paid leave. Be prepared to spend time over an extended period answering questions, and know that micro, small, mid-size, and larger businesses will each have unique concerns as well as common ones. There will also be variations by industry and job type. Get to know something about the practices in a particular industry or sector to make your education and advocacy most effective.

5 **Start with an ask that they can say "yes" to.** Once a business says "yes" to one request, they are more likely to say "yes" to the next request. Start with simple, easy asks that they are more likely to agree to. That said, if they take the time to reply with a "no," follow up to learn more about why that particular ask wasn't right for them and what types of engagements would feel more up their alley in the future.

6 **Businesses are not a switch to be turned on or off.** Businesses, like people, don't want to receive random transactional requests. Once you start to engage a business, you are in a relationship with them. They will want to date for a while before getting married. If they take an action with you, you can't ignore them for the next eight months and then email them right before a key committee hearing asking them to drive to the capital to testify. Keep them in the loop and find every opportunity to build the relationship.

7 **Speak to them in their language, not yours.** The language advocates use is not always the right language to use with the business community. Create custom materials (one-pagers, background sheets, etc.) that are aimed specifically at the business community and base your approach on research into their concerns and needs as much as you can.



YOUR BILL'S POLICY LANGUAGE AND BUSINESS ORGANIZING POTENTIAL

As you design the policy language for your paid leave bill, consider some ways in which the proposed policy could impact business organizing. Experience in other states has shown that there are a few key issues that can make it easier to engage business in your state:

1 **Consider an exemption or reduced rate of contributions for small businesses.** If your bill is for a statewide paid family and medical leave insurance program that will be paid for by a payroll deduction that is partially or fully paid by the employer, consider having an exemption for businesses with fewer than five, 10, or 15 employees, etc. The exact threshold size that will be workable depends on the distribution of business size in your state. Offering a reduced or exempt pay-in obligation for small businesses will give you an entry point for conversation and discussion in engaging small businesses and make it easier for you to find small businesses that will support the bill.

2 **Allow a private insurance option.** Some of the leading companies that provide paid leave to their own employees already contract with a private insurer for these benefits. If your bill includes an option for an employer to continue with their own private insurer to provide benefits equal to the state program, large employers appreciate that flexibility.

Additionally, having a private insurance option can help get the state insurance association on board to take a supportive or at least neutral stance on your legislation. Including a private insurance provision requires certain safeguards, however.

You will want to make sure that there is true equivalence between the public program and the private option and that workers in businesses opting for private coverage have rights to challenge a denial of leave or the improper amount of leave, or employment consequences of taking a paid leave.

3 **Include independent contractors.** Include independent contractors. Allowing independent contractors to opt-in to the statewide insurance program will increase your ability to organize key companies and associations where contractors are an important part of their ecosystem. Major gig economy leaders such as Lyft, Uber, Doordash, and Instacart may be more likely to support your bill if you include contractors.

Consider whether you would want to asl these workers to pay both the employee and employer portions of the paid leave fund contribution (as they do Social Security contributions) or whether they would just pay the worker portion and let the fund (and the contributions to it from traditional employers and employees) subsidize independent contractors' leaves.

4 **Comprehensive paid leave policies that include family caregiving and personal medical leave, as well as parental leave, are standard. This can be a benefit for businesses.** Many employers already provide parental leave but can't afford to also provide caregiving leave for an employee who needs to care for a family member with cancer or other serious illness; employers may or may not offer personal medical leave for a worker's serious health issue. A bill that includes family caregiving and medical leave is often seen by employers as a way that a state program could add more value to their existing benefits.



