national collaborative for infants & toddlers

NCIT Paid Family and Medical Leave Advocacy Toolkit

Overview

The United States is one of the only counties in the world that does not guarantee workers paid family and medical leave to bond with their young children or care for themselves or a sick or injured family member. Paid leave is important for the health of adults and children, especially infants and toddlers. Early relationships with parents and caregivers shape babies' brain development, laying the foundation for lifelong learning, health, and well-being. It's also good for the economy. Businesses that offer paid leave see increased productivity, profits, retention, and morale.

Throughout this toolkit, you'll find resources that can help you advocate for all workers—regardless of where they live or who they work for—to have access to paid family and medical leave to ensure that they can be healthy and provide the care and stability infants and toddlers need to thrive.

You Can Make an Impact

Learn more about building relationships with decisionmakers, elected officials, and other stakeholders.

How to be an advocate

Jump to the following resources to take action:

Messages
Handouts
Fast Facts
Op-Eds
Social Media Posts
Letters to the Editor

Messages

The messages below highlight why paid family and medical leave is essential for infants and toddlers, families, businesses, and the economy—while also offering tested calls to action for change. Use them to align your campaign, spark conversations, and push for policies that give all working families the time they need to care for their loved ones without sacrificing their jobs or financial security.

Strong, consistent messaging is key to driving support for paid family and medical leave. Don't worry about being repetitive: Repetition is key to amplifying the narrative, making the case, and engaging a wider coalition of support. To help keep your message on track, download the message wheel, a simple visual format for organizing the messages that are key to your issue.

Download Messaging Brief

Learn more about how to ensure message discipline

Core Message

The first three years of life are a crucial period for young children and their families. Early relationships with parents and caregivers shape a child's brain development, laying the foundation for lifelong learning, health, and well-being. Yet too many working parents and caregivers are forced to sacrifice their jobs and savings when they need time off to bond with their young children or care for themselves or a sick or injured family member. All workers—regardless of where they live or who they work for—should have access to paid family and medical leave to ensure that they can be healthy and provide the care and stability infants and toddlers need to thrive.

Supporting Messages

Most workers in the U.S. do not have access to paid family and medical leave to bond with a new child or care for themselves or a sick or injured family member.

- Less than a third of people have access to paid family and medical leave, leaving many families without financial security during a critical time for child development.
- Employees who work in production, transportation, construction, maintenance, and service sectors have some of the lowest rates of access to paid family and medical leave.
- Access to paid leave is lowest among workers who may need it most, including those with lower incomes, without college degrees, and who work part time.
- Black and Hispanic/Latino/a families report less access to paid leave than white families.

Paid family and medical leave is good for businesses and the economy.

- Women who take paid leave after the birth of a child are more likely to reenter the workforce within a year of the child's birth, supporting long-term economic growth.
- A workforce with reduced financial and emotional stress is a stronger workforce. Paid leave benefits businesses by increasing productivity and morale, improving employee retention, and reducing turnover costs.
- Investing in paid leave is a smart fiscal decision. States with paid leave programs see fewer families relying on public assistance, lowering costs for taxpayers.
- Children are the future leaders and wealth builders of society. Investing in paid leave now means investing in healthier children, a stronger workforce, and a more resilient economy for future generations. The return on investment is substantial, both in the short and longer term.

Paid family and medical leave should be available to all workers.

- The U.S. is one of the only countries in the world that does not guarantee paid leave, leaving millions of babies without the care they need in their earliest months of life.
- State and national paid leave policies should ensure all parents and caregivers—regardless of job type, income, or location—can take time to care for their families and themselves without risking job or financial security. This includes bonding with a new child, caring for an ill family member, and addressing personal health challenges.
- As of 2025, California, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Washington have already passed paid leave laws. These laws may help improve the health of families, reduce food insecurity, allow more women to reenter the workforce, and boost business and employee retention.
- Paid leave is popular among voters, regardless of party affiliation.

Paid family and medical leave is important for the short- and long-term health of young children and adults.

- The first three years of life are a crucial period for brain development. Paid leave ensures parents and caregivers have time to form strong bonds with their babies, promoting long-term well-being. We must act now to ensure that infants and toddlers grow into socially, emotionally, and physically healthy children and adults.
- Nursing parents who have access to paid leave are more likely to breastfeed, which has been shown to improve the heart health of the parent and baby.
- Paid leave improves infant health, reducing preterm births and low birthweights, especially for Black mothers.
- Parents and caregivers with paid leave are more likely to attend well-child visits and ensure their children receive necessary immunizations, reducing infant mortality and childhood illness and leading to long-term health benefits as children age.
- Black and Hispanic/Latino/a families are disproportionately impacted by the lack of paid leave, reinforcing existing inequities in maternal and infant health.

Fast Facts

To provide you with the best science and reduce review time, please find the following science-approved facts for you to use in your campaigns and materials. After each fact, you will find fast facts based on the science, which can be cut and pasted word-for-word without the need for additional science review.

Download Fast Facts as a PDF

Definitions of Paid Leave

- **Family leave:** time away from work to bond with and care for a new child or to care for a sick family member.
- **Medical leave:** time away from work to take care of personal medical conditions.

A Note on Financing Paid Family and Medical Leave

Most states with paid leave programs fund them through a small payroll tax, rather than placing the full burden on employers. This approach spreads the cost across both employers and employees. As of January 2025, no state with a paid leave program charges more than 1.4%, and most set the rate at 1% or less.

Source: New America. Explainer: Paid Leave Benefits and Funding in the United States. New America; 2025. Available from: https://www.newamerica.org/better-life-lab/briefs/explainer-paid-leave-benefits-and-funding-in-the-united-states/

Access to Paid Family and Medical Leave

FACT 1

In 2023, only 27% of private sector and 28% of state and local government workers in the U.S. had access to paid family leave through their employers to bond with a new child or care for a seriously ill or injured family member.

Fast Facts:

- Less than a third of people have access to paid family leave.
- Less than a third of people employed by private companies have access to paid family leave.
- Less than a third of state and local government workers have access to paid family leave.
- Most workers in the U.S. do not have access to paid family leave to bond with a new child or care for a sick or injured family member.

Source:

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2023. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; 2023 Sep. Available from: https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2023.htm

FACT 2

Access to paid family and medical leave is lowest among workers with the greatest needs. According to a 2021 study from the Urban Institute, access to paid leave remains highly skewed toward adults with higher incomes (81%), with college degrees (79%), and who work full time (79%). Black and Hispanic/Latino/a families report less access to paid leave than white families.

Fast Facts:

- Access to paid family and medical leave is lowest among workers with the greatest needs, including those with lower incomes, without college degrees, and who work part time.
- People with higher incomes, college degrees, and full-time jobs are more likely to have access to paid leave.
- White families are more likely to report having access to paid leave than Black and Hispanic/Latino/a families.
- Black and Hispanic/Latino/a families report less access to paid leave than white families.

Source:

Boyens C, Karpman M, Smalligan J. Access to paid leave is lowest among workers with the greatest needs. Urban Institute; 2022 Jul. Available from: https://www.urban.org/research/publication/access-paid-leave-lowest-among-workers-greatest-needs

Churchwell K, Elkind MSV, Benjamin RM, Carson AP, Chang EK, Lawrence W, Mills A, Odom TM, Rodriguez CJ, Rodriguez F, Sanchez E, Sharrief AZ, Sims M, Williams O; American Heart Association. Call to Action: Structural Racism as a Fundamental Driver of Health Disparities: A Presidential Advisory From the American Heart Association. Circulation. 2020 Dec 15;142(24):e454-e468. doi: 10.1161/CIR.0000000000000936.

FACT 3

In 2023, only 6% of workers with the lowest 10% of wages had access to paid family leave. Access to paid family leave continued to increase as wages increased. Still, less than half (48%) of workers with the highest 10% of wages had access to paid family leave.

Fast Facts:

- Workers with the lowest wages have the least access to paid family leave. Workers with the highest wages have the greatest access.
- Access to paid family leave increases as wages increase.
- Workers with the highest incomes are more than 12 times more likely to have access to paid family leave.
- Only 6% of the lowest paid workers in the U.S. have access to paid family leave.
- Even among the highest paid workers in the U.S., less than 50% have access to paid family leave.
- Less than half of all U.S. workers have access to paid family leave, regardless of income.

Source:

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2023. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; 2023 Sep. Available from: https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2023.htm

FACT 4

In 2023, 39% of workers in management, professional, and related occupations had access to paid family leave, more than any other major occupation. In contrast, employees in the production, transportation, construction, maintenance, and service sectors have among the lowest rates of access to paid family leave.

Fast Facts:

- People who work in managerial or professional jobs are more likely to have access to paid family leave than those who work in production or service jobs.
- People in management and professional roles have more access to paid family leave than any other occupation; yet only about one-third of them actually have access.
- Employees in production, transportation, construction, maintenance, and service sectors have some of the lowest rates of access to paid family leave.

Source:

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. What data does the BLS publish on family leave? U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; 2023 Sep. Available from: https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/factsheet/family-leave-benefits-fact-sheet.htm

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FACT 5

A 2023 survey by Data for Progress found that 79% of voters in the U.S. support a federal paid leave program. Support remained high regardless of political affiliation, including 92% of Democrats, 74% of Independents, and 72% of Republicans.

Fast Facts:

- Most voters support a federal paid leave program.
- Eight in 10 voters support a federal paid leave program.
- Among voters, there is strong bipartisan support for a federal paid leave program.
- Paid leave is a winning policy for Republicans, Democrats, and Independents.
- Almost all Democratic voters support a federal paid leave program.
- Most Republican voters support a federal paid leave program.
- Over 70% of Republican voters and over 90% of Democratic voters support a federal paid leave program.

Source:

Data for Progress. Voters Across Party Lines Overwhelmingly Support a Federal Paid Leave Program. Data for Progress; 2023 Feb 3. Available from: https://www.dataforprogress.org/blog/2023/2/3/voters-across-party-lines-overwhelmingly-support-a-federal-paid-leave-program

Health Impact of Paid Family and Medical Leave

FACT 6

One study found that the introduction of paid leave policies led to a reduction in the share of low birthweight and preterm births, especially for Black mothers.

Fast Facts:

- Paid leave policies have been shown to lead to healthier babies and mothers.
- When mothers have access to paid leave, they have been shown to have healthier babies.
- Paid leave policies may lead to fewer preterm and low birthweight babies, especially for Black mothers.
- When Black mothers have access to paid leave, they have been to have significantly fewer preterm births and babies with low birthweight.

Source:

Stearns J. The effects of paid maternity leave: Evidence from Temporary Disability Insurance. J Health Econ. 2015 Sep;43:85-102. doi: 10.1016/j.jhealeco.2015.04.005.

FACT 7

One study found that the enactment of California's paid family leave policy significantly improved food security for households with infants under age 1, compared to states without a policy. Specifically, researchers attributed a 2.3 percentage point drop in food insecurity to the paid leave law. The policy had an even greater impact on households below 185% of the poverty level and those with multiple children.

Fast Facts:

- California's paid leave policy improved food security for households that recently welcomed a child.
- Infants experienced significantly less food insecurity after California enacted a paid leave policy.
- A California paid leave law decreased food insecurity among families with the greatest need.
- California's paid leave law significantly decreased food insecurity for households with multiple children and low income.
- California's paid leave law significantly decreased food insecurity for households with multiple children.
- California's paid leave law significantly decreased food insecurity for households with low income.

Source:

Lenhart O. The effects of paid family leave on food insecurity – evidence from California. Rev Econ Household. 2021;19:615-639. doi: 10.1007/s11150-020-09537-4.

FACT 8

Studies show that after California's paid family leave policy was enacted, breastfeeding rates among new mothers increased and infant hospitalizations decreased.

Fast Facts:

- When California implemented a paid leave policy, more mothers reported breastfeeding, and fewer babies were hospitalized.
- Paid leave in California is linked to increased breastfeeding reported by new mothers.
- California's paid leave policy is linked to a decrease in infant hospitalizations.

Source:

Huang R, Yang M. Paid maternity leave and breastfeeding practice before and after California's implementation of the nation's first paid leave program. Econ Hum Biol. 2015;16:45-59. doi: 10.1016/j.ehb.2013.12.009.

Pihl AM, Basso G. Did California paid family leave impact infant health? J Policy Anal Manage. 2019;38(1):155-80.

FACT 9

Paid leave policies may lead to long-term health benefits, in part by encouraging prompt medical check-ups during infancy. One study found that after California implemented its paid family leave policy, rates of overweight, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and hearing-related problems declined among elementary school-age children.

Fast Facts:

- Paid leave policies may have long-term health benefits for children, partly due to prompt medical check-ups during infancy.
- When parents have paid leave, children may grow up healthier.
- Being able to bond with and care for a new child may have long-term health benefits as the child grows up.
- After California enacted paid family leave, children were less likely to experience excess weight gain, be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or face hearing-related issues.

Source:

Rossin-Slater M, Uniat L. Paid family leave policies and population health. Health Aff. 2019 Mar. doi: 10.1377/hpb20190301.484936.

Lichtman-Sadot S, Bell NP. Child health in elementary school following California's paid family leave policy. J Policy Anal Manage. 2017;36(4):790-827. doi: 10.1002/pam.22012.

Business Impact of Paid Family and Medical Leave

FACT 10

One study found that employees who reported taking paid leave were more likely to be working nine to 12 months after a child's birth, compared to women who reported taking no leave.

Fast Facts:

- Women who take paid leave after the birth of a child are more likely to reenter the workforce within a year of the child's birth.
- Women who do not take paid leave after the birth of a child are less likely to reenter the workforce within a year of the child's birth.

Source:

Houser L, Vartanian TP. Pay matters: The positive economic impacts of paid family leave for families, businesses and the public. Rutgers Center for Women and Work; 2012. Available from: https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/smlr/files/Documents/Centers/CWW/Publications/CWW%20Paid%20Leave%20Brief%20Jan%202012.pdf

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FACT 11

In one study, employers reported that paid leave either had no effect on their establishment or had a positive effect on productivity, profits, retention, employee morale, and turnover.

Fast Facts:

- When employers offer paid leave, it may benefit the employees and the business.
- Businesses that offer paid leave may see increased productivity, profits, retention, and morale and decreased turnover.
- Offering employees paid leave may be good business: it may increase productivity, profits, retention, and morale and may decrease turnover.
- Workers who can take paid time off work to care for themselves or a family member may be more productive.

Source:

Appelbaum E, Milkman R. Leaves that pay: Employer and worker experiences with paid family leave in California. Center for Economic and Policy Research; 2011. Available from: https://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf

The Council of Economic Advisors, Executive Office of the President of the United States. The economics of paid and unpaid leave. Executive Office of the President of the United States; 2014 Jun. Available from: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/leave_report_final.pdf

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FACT 12

Providing paid leave may level the playing field for small businesses. Small businesses that cannot afford to offer the same generous leave benefits as larger companies may have a competitive disadvantage in hiring.

Fast Facts:

- Offering paid leave may make small businesses more competitive with larger companies.
- Small businesses that do not offer paid leave may be at a disadvantage when hiring compared to large companies that do offer paid leave.

Source:

Appelbaum E, Milkman R. Leaves that pay: Employer and worker experiences with paid family leave in California. Center for Economic and Policy Research; 2011. Available from: https://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf

FACT 13

In California, 92% of employers reported that paid family leave had a positive or neutral effect on employee turnover, saving employers the costly step of replacing an existing employee.

Fast Facts:

- In California, where paid leave is universal, most employers say that offering paid leave saves them money by having either a positive or neutral effect on employee turnover.
- According to 92% of California employers, paid family leave reduces or does not impact employee turnover, helping businesses save time and money

Source:

Appelbaum E, Milkman R. Leaves that pay: Employer and worker experiences with paid family leave in California. Center for Economic and Policy Research; 2011. Available from: https://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf

Economic Impact of Paid Family and Medical Leave

FACT 14

A study published in 2020 found that access to paid leave may reduce reliance on public assistance programs, depending on each individual family's overall resources. In particular, the study found that living in a state with paid maternity leave was associated with a 4.3% decreased use of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and reduced the benefits received per year by $104 per family, compared to living in a state without paid maternity leave.

Fast Facts:

- Paid leave policies may reduce families' need to rely on public assistance programs.
- In states with paid maternity leave, fewer families have to rely on public assistance programs likeTemporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).
- When families have access to paid leave, they can be more financially independent and less dependent on public assistance programs.
- When states enact paid leave, it can save them money by reducing reliance on public assistance programs.

Source:

Kang J. The effect of paid maternity leave on low-income families' welfare use in the US. Soc Policy Adm. 2020;54(6):1-19. doi: 10.1111/spol.12618.

FACT 15

One study found that women who take paid leave were 39% less likely to participate in other government-sponsored assistance programs in the year following childbirth, compared to women who take no leave.

Fast Facts:

- Women who take paid leave are nearly 40% less likely to rely on federal assistance programs during the first year of their child's life.
- Women who do not have access to paid leave may be more reliant on government assistance programs during the first year of their child's life.

Source:

Houser L, Vartanian TP. Pay matters: The positive economic impacts of paid family leave for families, businesses and the public. Rutgers Center for Women and Work; 2012. Available from: https://smlr.rutgers.edu/sites/smlr/files/Documents/Centers/CWW/Publications/CWW%20Paid%20Leave%20Brief%20Jan%202012.pdf

Social Media Posts

Social media is a powerful tool for growing community support for paid family and medical leave. A compelling and well-timed post can help engage your audience, amplify your message far beyond your existing network, and drive action.

Tips for creating engaging social content:

- Posts with visuals tend to get more views and shares.
- Short (under 90 seconds), authentic videos perform best. Feature real stories from your advocates.
- Use relevant hashtags.
- Ask questions, run polls, and invite personal stories.
- Create posts with clear calls to action: share, comment, tag, or visit your site.
- Acknowledge and repost content from supporters and partners.
- Tag partners and stakeholders, but be mindful of lobbying rules: posts that tag legislators and express views on specific bills may count as direct lobbying.

Make your content inclusive and accessible:

- Use diverse, inclusive images to reflect the communities you serve.
- Include alt text for images and captions on videos to meet accessibility standards.

Below are social posts and graphics that align with the messages that you can download and use to build support for paid family and medical leave.

Download Social Graphics

Social Graphics

When workers have access to paid family and medical leave **businesses & the economy benefit**

Paid leave **benefits business** by:

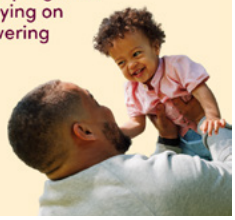
- Increasing productivity and morale
- Improving employee retention
- Reducing turnover costs

Paid leave helps women **return to the workforce**

Women who take paid leave after the birth of a child are more likely to reenter the workforce within a year of the child's birth, supporting long-term economic growth.

Paid leave **strengthens the economy**

States with paid leave programs see fewer families relying on public assistance, lowering costs for taxpayers.



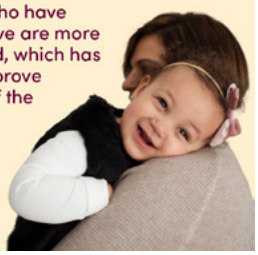
When workers have access to paid family and medical leave **infants & toddlers thrive**

Paid family and medical leave helps workers with young children:

- Bond with a new child
- Attend well-child visits
- Manage care for their children, families, and themselves

Paid leave **helps infants & toddlers thrive**

Nursing parents who have access to paid leave are more likely to breastfeed, which has been shown to improve the heart health of the parent and baby.



Paid leave **helps infants & toddlers thrive**

Paid leave policies may have long-term health benefits for children, partly due to on-schedule medical check-ups during the first few months of the baby's life.

Social Posts

You can use these sample posts as-is or customize them to your needs, like with specific data for your state or city or adding relevant hashtags. See below for a list of suggested hashtags.

- We know policies work to help babies and toddlers thrive. Let's work together to guarantee paid family and medical leave for all parents and caregivers.
- Paid family and medical leave isn't just good for families—it's good for business. Let's invest in a future with healthier babies, a more resilient workforce, and a stronger economy for all.
- Babies are born with amazing capabilities and rapidly-growing brains. Let's ensure that parents and caregivers have access to paid family and medical leave so that all babies have the care and support they need to have the healthiest start to life possible.
- Less than a third of workers in the United States have paid family leave. And those with the least access—including workers of color and workers with low incomes—are often those who need it most.
- If there's one thing we can agree on, it is that we have a collective commitment to our youngest generation. We have a shared responsibility to make policies that support ALL babies and toddlers to grow socially, emotionally, and physically.
- The United States is one of the only countries without national paid family and medical leave. That's not just a policy failure—it's a missed opportunity to support families, reduce inequities, and boost our economy.
- The first years of life are key to healthy brain development. Yet less than a third of workers in the United States have access to paid family leave. When we fail to invest in paid leave, we're failing to invest in our future. Let's make sure every child gets the strong start they deserve.
- The first three years of a child's life are critical for brain development, health, and emotional well-being. But without paid family and medical leave, too many parents and caregivers are forced to choose between their paycheck and their baby. It doesn't have to be this way. It's time to guarantee paid family and medical leave for all workers—no matter where they live or what job they hold.
- Imagine bringing your newborn home and immediately worrying how you'll afford to take care of them. That's the reality for millions of U.S. workers without paid family and medical leave. Parents and caregivers need time to bond with and care for their families without the threat of financial hardship or losing their job.

Relevant Hashtags

To make your hashtags easier to read and more accessible, capitalize the first letter of each word whenever possible if the platform allows.

- #NCIT
- #PN3
- #PaidLeave
- #PaidFamilyLeave
- #PaidMedicalLeave
- #PFML
- #PaidLeaveForAll
- #PaidLeaveNow
- #CareCantWait
- #InvestInFamilies

Handouts

Whether you're meeting in-person or virtually with stakeholders or decisionmakers, sending an email to a journalist, or conducting other communications and advocacy, these ready-to-share handouts about paid family and medical leave are important resources to have handy. The handouts can be printed out or sent digitally to provide general and business-focused stakeholders with facts and messages about paid family and medical leave.

Download Handout

Download Business Handout

Op-Eds

An opinion editorial, or op-ed, is a powerful tool for shaping public conversation and influencing decision-makers. Published in newspapers or online outlets, op-eds allow advocates to share personal stories, highlight key issues, and make a compelling case for change. Because competition for attention is high, op-eds should feature strong, persuasive voices and well-reasoned arguments. Whether calling for policy change or raising awareness, op-eds can connect with readers on an emotional level and inspire action. A well-placed op-ed can reach legislators, journalists, and the broader community, making it a valuable advocacy tool.

Every outlet has different submission guidelines. In most cases, the outlet will have a limit on word count (usually around 500-700 words). Submissions must also be original and exclusive to that outlet. This can usually be found on the media outlet's website under the Opinion section.

Tips for writing and placing an effective op-ed:

- **Choose the Right Signer:** A well-known or credible voice, such as a community leader, expert, or advocate, can increase your op-ed's chances of being published and taken seriously.
- **Get to the Point:** Stick to one main point, and make it early. Keep your argument focused, and back it up with facts, examples, and data (if available).
- **Write conversationally:** Avoid jargon, fancy words, and slang. Your op-ed must be understandable to the general public, including people that may have no knowledge of the issue or your campaign. It is generally accepted for accessibility that information should be written at a 6th-grade reading level or lower. You can check how accessible your op-ed is here.

- **Make it Persuasive and Relatable:** Use compelling stories and strong reasoning to engage readers and drive action. Tell readers why they should care and what they can do.
- **Time Your Submission Strategically:** Plan ahead and submit your op-ed when it's most relevant to current events or public conversations.
- **Be Prepared for Edits and Follow-Ups:** Editors may request revisions, and if you don't hear back within 48 hours, follow up or consider submitting elsewhere.

Below are sample op-eds you can use to call for paid family and medical leave policies, including for campaigns working on an incremental approach, like paid leave for state and local government employees. Use the messages to build a clear and compelling case and specific ask of your readers.

Download the Customizable Op-Ed Template Expressing Support for Paid Leave for All Employees

Download the Customizable Op-Ed Template Expressing Support for Paid Leave for State and Local Government Employees

Example: Op-Ed – Paid Leave for All Employees

Title: Paid Leave is Essential for Babies, Families, and Our Economy

Offer a short, snappy headline. A good headline gives readers a preview of what your op-ed has to say. Keep in mind that some news outlets will write their own headlines, regardless of what you submit.

Open with a clear, strong summary of your case: We all want babies to grow up healthy, supported, and ready to thrive. The first three years of life are a critical period for brain development, setting the foundation for a child's lifelong learning and social, emotional, and physical health. Yet, too many parents and caregivers are forced to choose between caring for their children and keeping their jobs. The lack of guaranteed paid family and medical leave policy leaves millions of families—especially those in low-wage jobs—without the support they need during this critical stage or development.

Customize: Write a specific, declarative summary of the case and the ask you are making. This sets up the rest of the piece—and if a reader doesn't get farther than the first paragraph, they get the point.

Present your specific problem: The problem is clear: lack of paid leave harms babies, parents, and communities. Less than a third of workers in the U.S. have access to paid family and medical leave through their employers. This means that far too many new parents—especially Black and Hispanic/Latino/a families, who are disproportionately affected by economic instability—must return to work before they or their child are ready. Research shows that when parents can't take time off, it increases maternal stress, disrupts critical infant medical visits, and leads to worse health outcomes for both parents and babies.

Customize by sharing a local/relevant situation, as broadly relatable as possible, that illustrates how lack of paid leave harms infants and toddlers.

Share what works: Fortunately, we know what works. Paid leave improves infant and maternal health, reducing preterm births, supporting breastfeeding, and lowering postpartum depression. It also strengthens family financial stability, reducing the need for public assistance and helping parents stay in the workforce long term. States that have implemented paid leave programs—such as California, Colorado, and New York—demonstrate that these policies benefit not just families, but also businesses and the economy. Paid leave increases employee retention, reduces turnover costs, and creates a stronger, more productive workforce.

Customize by inserting evidence to support your argument. Evidence may include reports/studies, data, personal or professional experience, case studies, and stories.

Press for a solution & CTA: We have an opportunity to build a national system that works for all families. A comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy should ensure that every parent—no matter where they work or how much they earn—has the time and financial stability to care for their newborn or adopted child. It should be funded sustainably, through small payroll contributions from employers, employees, or both, just as successful state programs have done.

Customize by inserting your specific policy/funding or proof point/focus.

Strong closing: Too many parents are going it alone because our systems of support are falling short. We must change that. Every baby deserves a strong start, and every parent deserves the peace of mind to provide it. It's time to make paid family and medical leave a national priority.

Customize by referencing your opening and ending on a hopeful/forward looking note.

Example: Op-Ed – Paid Leave for State and Local Government Employees

Title: Public Employees in [STATE or CITY] Deserve Paid Family Leave

Offer a short, snappy headline. A good headline gives readers a preview of what your op-ed has to say. Keep in mind that some news outlets will write their own headlines, regardless of what you submit.

Open with a clear, strong summary of your case: We live up to our country's promise when we ensure that all babies get a strong, healthy start. The first three years of life are a time of rapid brain development, laying the foundation for learning, relationships, and long-term health. But less than a third of state and local government workers in the United States—public servants who help keep our communities running—have access to paid family and medical leave.

Customize: Write a specific, declarative summary of the case and the ask you are making. This sets up the rest of the piece—and if a reader doesn't get farther than the first paragraph, they get the point.

Present your specific problem: That means that when a baby is born, a loved one falls ill, or a personal medical emergency arises, millions of workers are forced to choose between their paycheck and caring for themselves or their families.

Customize by sharing a local/relevant situation, as broadly relatable as possible, that illustrates how lack of paid leave harms infants and toddlers: e.g., A teacher returning to the classroom two weeks postpartum, or a state employee forced to deplete retirement savings to care for a child with cancer.

Share what works: Fortunately, we know what works. Paid leave improves infant and maternal health, reducing preterm births, supporting breastfeeding, and lowering postpartum depression. It also strengthens family financial stability, reducing the need for public assistance and helping parents stay in the workforce long term. States that have implemented paid leave programs—such as California, Colorado, and New York—demonstrate that these policies benefit not just families, but also businesses and the economy. Paid leave increases employee retention, reduces turnover costs, and creates a stronger, more productive workforce.

Customize by inserting evidence to support your argument. Evidence may include reports/studies, data, personal or professional experience, case studies, and stories.

Press for a solution & CTA: We have a chance to do better for public employees right here in [STATE or CITY] by enacting a comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy that is funded sustainably through small payroll contributions from employers, employees, or both, just as successful state programs have done.

Customize by inserting your specific policy/funding or proof point/focus.

Strong closing: Ensuring paid family and medical leave for the people who serve our community sends a powerful message: caregiving is valued, and no one should have to risk their financial security to care for a child or recover from illness. It's an important first step that supports families, strengthens our workforce, and moves us closer to the future our children deserve.

Customize by referencing your opening and ending on a hopeful/forward looking note.

Letters To The Editor

A Letter to the Editor (LTE) is a short, public response to an article, editorial, or op-ed in a newspaper or online media outlet. It's a free and effective way to voice your opinion, provide additional context, or highlight key issues that matter to your community. Lawmakers and decision-makers often pay attention to LTEs, making them a powerful tool for advocacy. Because they are shorter and often easier to place than op-eds, LTEs offer a great opportunity to amplify your message and engage the public in important conversations about paid family and medical leave.

Learn more about how to write and leverage an LTE, op-ed, or blog post

Generally, shorter letters—200 words or less—have a better chance of being published. Include the following elements:

- **Salutation:** To the Editor
- **Strong opening:** Tell readers your point of view and why it should matter to them.
- **Explain the issue and its importance:** Use simple, plain language with supporting points or data to back up your arguments.
- **Call for action or offer ways to learn more.**
- **Sign the author's full name and title if relevant.**

Every outlet has different submission guidelines, so you should check the guidelines for the news outlet that you are responding to verify length and submission requirements. This can usually be found on the media outlet's website under the Opinion section. You can see an example of an outlet's submission guidelines here and an online tool that will help you draft an LTE here.

Below are examples of letters to the editor that incorporate NCIT's paid family and medical leave messaging:

Download the Customizable Letter to the Editor Expressing Agreement

Download the Customizable Letter to the Editor Expressing Disagreement

Example: Letter to the Editor 1 – Agreement

To the Editor of *[insert name of newspaper or media outlet]*,

I applaud the recent article, *[insert headline and publication date]*, highlighting the urgent need for paid family and medical leave. Ensuring that all workers have access to paid leave—especially during the crucial early years of a child's life—is one of the most effective ways to set children and families up to thrive.

The first three years of a child's life is a period of rapid brain development, and the care infants and toddlers receive during this time has lifelong impacts. Yet, too many parents and caregivers are forced to forego bonding with and caring for their young children during this critical stage of development. Paid leave helps ensure that parents and caregivers can care for their children without sacrificing their income or job security.

Research shows that paid leave improves infant and maternal health, supports financial stability, and strengthens our workforce. It's a policy that benefits children, families, businesses, and our economy. We must act now to ensure every child gets the strong start they deserve by passing comprehensive paid leave policies.

[Signature]

Example: Letter to the Editor 2 – Disagreement

To the Editor of *[insert name of newspaper or media outlet]*,

Your recent coverage of *[state the issue; do not repeat the erroneous information]* overlooks a critical point: *[state your position or policy priority, or use this general statement: Paid family and medical leave is not just an employee benefit—it is critical to the well-being of babies, families, and our broader economy.]*

The first three years of a child's life are a time of immense brain growth and development, and when parents and caregivers have the time and financial security to care for their young children, the benefits extend far beyond the family. Research consistently shows that paid leave leads to healthier babies, lower rates of maternal depression, improved long-term outcomes for children, and benefits business and the economy.

Despite the overwhelming evidence, most parents and caregivers in the U.S. are forced to forego bonding with and caring for their young children during this critical stage of development because we lack a national paid leave policy. This is unacceptable. We must prioritize policies that give families the support they need to raise the next generation of healthy, thriving children.

[Signature]