

October 26, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

As the negotiations around the budget reconciliation package continue, we write today to urge the Administration to continue its steadfast support for an inclusive, universal paid family and medical leave program that includes individuals with serious illnesses and health conditions and their caregivers. As the Secretary of Health and Human Services, you have the unique insight on how a program like this can improve access to essential healthcare for millions of people across the United States.

The 19 undersigned organizations represent millions of patients, caregivers, medical professionals, people with disabilities and their families, and other individuals harmed by a lack of paid leave. As the global pandemic continues, these organizations recognize the value of ensuring workers can take time off to either recover from an illness or care for a loved one without missing a paycheck.

More than 102 million people – 77 percent of workers – do not have paid family leave through their employer to care for a new child or a loved one with a serious health condition or to address their own medical issue.¹ Without access to paid family and medical leave, workers' health suffers, and families face significant stress and pressure.

Multiple studies demonstrate the health benefits of workers having access to paid family and medical leave:

- Adult caregivers of loved ones with Alzheimer's disease or other types of dementia who have access to paid family and medical leave have reported a positive impact not only on being able to take their loved ones to their appointments, but also on their own health and own emotional well-being.²
- Cancer patients and survivors have a significant increase in positive outcomes in being able to complete their treatments, make it to their appointments, and manage their symptoms or side effects, when having access to paid family and medical leave.³
- Access to paid family and medical leave enables parents of children with special health care needs to ensure they can access the services their children need. Paid leave means that parents can care for an ill or injured child at home, and that if their child needs care in a hospital that they can be present to provide additional care and comfort, which is associated with better child health outcomes.⁴

¹ <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/key-facts-paid-family-and-medical-leave.pdf>

² https://www.usagainstalzheimer.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/A_New_Frontier_In_Paid_Leave.pdf

³ <https://www.fightcancer.org/sites/default/files/ACS%20CAN%20Paid%20Leave%20Surveys%20Key%20Findings%20Press%20Memo%20FINAL.pdf>

⁴ 2016 NASEM report *Parenting Matters* (<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/21868/parenting-matters-supporting-parents-of-children-ages-0-8>)

- Parents of newborns not only need the time to bond with their child but having access to paid family and medical leave improves maternal and infant health. For example, longer paid leave allows for a newborn to receive more breast-feeding, consistent medical care, and immunizations, which all lead to better health outcomes. ⁵

Due to systemic racism and other factors, workers of color and low-income workers are the least likely to have access to employer-provided paid family and medical leave. During the pandemic, Black and Latino workers were most likely to need time from work due to COVID-19 symptoms, exposure, or relative caregiving, and people of color and with lower incomes are disproportionately impacted by many of the diseases our groups represent. This results in the very individuals who are most likely to need to use paid family and medical leave are the ones least likely to have access to it. Creating a universal and inclusive paid family and medical leave program will help lessen some of these health inequities caused by systemic racism.

Comprehensive paid family and medical leave is essential for the health of individuals across the lifespan. Being able to take time off work is fundamentally an access to care issue, and the status quo forces many patients and caregivers to choose between treating their illness and having enough income to survive – while also exacerbating health inequities. A universal paid leave program will help eliminate these tough choices.

We urge you to strongly support an inclusive, universal paid family and medical leave program in the budget reconciliation package to improve the health and economic security of millions of individuals.

Thank you for considering our request. If you have any questions or would like to talk with us, please contact Michelle McGrain, Director of Congressional Relations, Economic Justice, National Partnership for Women and Families at mmcgrain@nationalpartnership.com and Jason Resendez, Executive Director of the UsAgainstAlzheimer's Center for Brain Health Equity at jresendez@usagainstalzheimer.org.

Sincerely,

AARP
 American Academy of Pediatrics
 American Geriatrics Society
 American Heart Association
 Child Neurology Foundation
 HFC
 March of Dimes
 Muscular Dystrophy Association
 National Adult Day Services Association
 (NADSA)
 National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship
 National Hispanic Medical Association
 National Partnership for Women and Families
 National Patient Advocate Foundation
 Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers
 The Mended Hearts, Inc.
 Triage Cancer
 UsAgainstAlzheimer's
 WomenHeart: The National Coalition for
 Women with Heart Disease

⁵ <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/health-care/paid-leave-is-essential-for-healthy-moms-and-babies.pdf>