

Economic Opportunity Institute

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Poll Shows Strong Support for Expanding Family Leave Benefits:

Respondents willing to pay for improvements, support government action

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Results

Results from a statewide poll commissioned by the Economic Opportunity Institute indicate that a vast majority of Washington residents favor expanding family leave benefits and are willing to pay for it. The poll, conducted by the Evans/McDonough Company in October 2000, determined voter interest in expanding the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. The act provides for unpaid leave for up to 12 weeks for workers in businesses or organizations with 50 or more employees; leave may be used to take care of a newborn or newly adopted child, a seriously ill family member, or for the worker's own serious medical condition. The Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI) is a nonpartisan, public policy institute working on issues of economic security for working families.

The poll showed strong support for government action to expand family leave job protections to more workers and a willingness to fund a family leave insurance program.

- 81% strongly or somewhat strongly favor the existing Family and Medical Leave Act.
- 74% favor establishing Family Leave Insurance for Washington workers and would support a new two cent an hour payroll tax shared by workers and employers to fund it.
- 73% continued to support a new family leave insurance fund even after hearing opposing arguments.

Support for Family Leave Insurance cuts across political party, geography, age, income, and gender lines [chart attached]:

- 85% of those who favor Democrats and 65% of those who favor Republicans support establishing a family leave insurance system.
- 79% of women under age 50 and 72% of men under age 50 favor family leave insurance.
- 77% of those with children under 18 at home and 73% of those with no children at home are in support.
- 77% of those who believed they would likely need to care for an aging parent in the next five years (45% of poll respondents) are in support
- 78% of respondents with household income less than \$35,000 and 80% of respondents in households earning more than \$75,000 support family leave insurance.

According to Marilyn Watkins, Economic Security Director at EOI, almost half of all workers are excluded from the federal statute. "Of the people who are eligible, many don't take leave because they simply cannot afford to," she said. A federal evaluation of the Family and Medical Leave Act found that companies where employees are eligible and do take family and medical leave see improved employee productivity, reduced employee turnover, reduced employee absences, and employee career advancement with almost no noticeable effect on profitability or growth. "It's a win-win for families and for business," Ms. Watkins noted.

Washington voters realize the value of family leave and are willing to pay to fund partial wage replacement for those on leave. “It is clear from the poll that Washington voters are interested in expanding the program to include all workers and providing some income support during leave,” Ms. Watkins added. “Family leave insurance is an equitable way to enable **all** workers to take time off of work to care for their family members in times of critical need and not lose their job.

As real wages for middle and low-income families have stagnated over the past 20 years, it has become more and more difficult for families to take time away from work to care for newborn children or seriously ill parents. It is extraordinarily difficult for workers who, in addition to losing income, may also lose their jobs.

The Economic Opportunity Institute is proposing to extend family and medical leave job protection to all workers and provide partial wage replacement for 5 weeks. “This will allow parents to care for their newborn children and elderly family members when they are most vulnerable,” Ms. Watkins added. “The poll showed strong support for family leave insurance so that a family can deal with a medical emergency without being thrown into a financial emergency.”

In 1989, Washington state was one of the first states in the nation to pass family leave policy. Washington’s law soon became a model for other states and catalyzed national action.



Poll Demographics

Percentage Who Would Vote to Support or Oppose a New Tax for Family Leave Insurance		
Demographic Group	New Tax for Family Leave Insurance	
	Support	Oppose
All Respondents (N=400)	74%	21%
Male (48%)	73%	24%
Female (52%)	76%	19%
Those who favor Democrats	85%	12%
Those who favor Republicans	65%	32%
Employed (57%)	76%	22%
Retired or other	72%	21%
Have children under 18 at home (32%)	77%	20%
Don't have children at home (67%)	73%	22%
Likely to care for aging parent in next 5 years (45%)	77%	18%
Annual household income under \$35,000 (23%)	78%	18%
Annual household income \$35,000-75,000 (38%)	76%	21%
Annual household income over \$75,000 (21%)	80%	19%
Men under age 50	72%	26%
Men over age 50	73%	22%

Percentage Who Would Vote to Support or Oppose a New Tax for Family Leave Insurance		
Demographic Group	New Tax for Family Leave Insurance	
	Support	Oppose
Women under age 50	79%	17%
Women over age 50	74%	20%
Eastern Washington	74%	20%
Peninsula	75%	14%
Southwestern Washington	77%	22%
Northwestern Washington	80%	14%
Puget Sound	73%	24%



Additional Contacts

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Related Link(s)

- [EOI Economic Security Policy - Family Leave Insurance](#)



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