



Economic Opportunity Institute

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**California Launches Paid Family Leave Program
Washington Legislators Plan Similar Program, Polls Support Policy Change**

On July 1, California's new Paid Family Leave Law goes into effect, providing most Californians six weeks of partial pay when taking leave from work to care for a seriously ill parent, spouse, child, or domestic partner, or to bond with a new baby, foster, or adopted child. State Senator Karen Keiser and State Representative Mary Lou Dickerson plan to propose a similar program for Washington.

Senator Keiser and Representative Dickerson, long-time champions in the fight to balance work and family responsibilities, are looking at funding mechanisms and policies for a family leave insurance program adapted to Washington. In 2002, they sponsored Washington's Family Care Act, which passed overwhelmingly. That act allows workers with paid leave (sick leave, vacation, and personal time off) to use their leave to care for an ill child or family member. Regrettably, more than half a million workers in the state have no paid leave, and few have enough sick leave and vacation to handle a new baby or serious illness. .

"Allowing all workers to have critical time off to take care of their own illness, a new baby, or an ill family member is good for families and for employers," said Senator Keiser. "Paid family leave is an insurance policy for those critical times."

Both state and national polls have shown consistently strong support for paid family leave. A public opinion survey in Washington found that 74% of state residents support establishing family leave insurance. Results of a new poll of California residents will be released on Tuesday, June 29.

"Too many families are torn apart by having to choose between their paycheck and caring for each other. Parents come to work when they shouldn't. They suffer, their children suffer, and their employers suffer," said Representative Dickerson. "Our legislature is taking too long to put a program in place."

"Presenteeism," a new term coined by economists for individuals who come to work ill, costs more than \$180 billion a year according to a Cornell University study. Employers spend thousands of dollars in recruiting and training costs when people have to quit their jobs to take care of a new baby or aging parent. With paid family leave, workers have critical time to adjust to a medical crisis or new baby without losing their jobs and while maintaining financial stability. Paid family leave results in stronger families, more productive businesses, and more stable communities.

Senator Keiser and Representative Dickerson are working with more than 30 community groups as part of the Family Leave Coalition. Chaired by Marilyn Watkins, Policy Director at the Economic Opportunity Institute, the coalition promotes family-friendly workplace policies.

“California’s example is spurring other states to take action,” Dr. Watkins noted. “Family leave insurance will save jobs, save money, and protect our families during tough times.”