

**Washington Family Leave Coalition
Press Release**

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**New Poll Shows Strong Support for Family Leave Insurance:
State Task Force Encouraged By Results**

SEATTLE, WA – Members of task force charged with helping implement Washington’s family leave law were buoyed by results from a nationwide poll of frequent voters that show strong support for a family leave insurance fund to provide income for parents on leave while caring for a newborn or newly-adopted child.

A new national poll conducted by Lake Research Partners found that three-quarters of respondents favored creating a family leave insurance fund through a small deduction from workers’ paychecks or a combination of worker and employer payments. A similar poll of Washington voters released in March 2007 pegged support for such a measure at 73%.

Strong support for family leave insurance was evident in virtually every demographic group and geographic region, even crossing party lines. Nationally, Democrats registered 81%, Independents 73%, and Republicans 69% in support; in Washington, 86% of Democrats, 67% of Independents, and 60% of Republicans were in favor.

The national poll results were released the same day the Washington State Family Leave Insurance Joint Legislative Task Force meets to review options for administering Washington’s new family leave insurance law, scheduled to take effect in October 2009. The bi-partisan task force, made up of legislators and citizens, is co-chaired by Senator Karen Keiser (D-Seattle) and Representative MaryLou Dickerson (D-Kent), co-sponsors of the legislation that enacted Washington’s new family leave law.

“There are real consequences for our workers, families and businesses when family values end at the workplace door. I’m proud that Washington is taking the lead in helping workers take time to care for their families,” said Keiser.

Added Dickerson, “Small business owners know that supporting families is critical to their company’s success – but they often lack the resources to provide pay during extended leaves. Washington’s paid family leave program will help by providing some income to workers who take leave as new parents.”

The new polling data is contained in a just-published report called “Family Values at Work – It’s About Time!” Funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and issued by the MultiState Working Families Consortium in conjunction with ten national organizations, it highlights how outdated national workplace standards are failing to meet the needs of modern families:

- More than half of private sector workers are not covered by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which provides only unpaid family leave for workers at companies of 50 or more employees.
- 3.5 million workers eligible to take FMLA leave in 1999-2000 did not take their leave because they could not afford to go without pay.

“We’ve seen a huge jump in the percentage of mothers with children who are in the workforce, from just over half in 1975 to 75% today. About 1 in 4 families have responsibilities to care for an elderly relative, and those numbers will increase as our population ages,” according to Marilyn Watkins, Policy Director at the Economic Opportunity Institute, a non-profit, non-partisan research organization and member of the Washington Family Leave Coalition.

“Washington’s workplace policies need to respond to these dramatic shifts,” declared Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, Executive Director of MomsRising, an advocacy group that supports family leave policies nationwide and member of the Washington task force, “otherwise we’re punishing mothers simply for being mothers, forcing them to mortgage their futures to take care of their babies. Parents should be able to care for their newborns joyfully, not under the threat of financial ruin.”

Washington is at the forefront of a national trend for paid family leave, preceded by California, which has provided paid family and medical leave since 2004. Active efforts to secure family leave insurance are now underway in Illinois, New Jersey and New York, and a number of states are pursuing other policy changes to adapt the workplace to today’s family realities, including paid sick days and expansions of Family and Medical Leave Act protections. Nationally, Senators Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) and Chris Dodd (D-Connecticut) introduced a bipartisan bill in June 2007 that would provide workers with eight weeks of paid family and medical leave.

“Paid family leave is popular because it pays off for employers with substantial cost savings in the form of lower turnover rates and improved productivity, and for taxpayers and society with healthier children and families, reduced need for public assistance, and better care for seniors,” said Watkins.

The Washington Family Leave Coalition includes organizations representing seniors, women, labor, health professionals, children’s advocates, faith communities, low-income workers, employers, and others. It advocates for new state policies to promote healthy families, healthy businesses, and healthy communities in the 21st century economy.