

Federal-State Partnerships to Expand Paid Family & Medical Leave

Lelaine Bigelow & Shamaal Sheppard

At some point in our lives, nearly all of us will need to take time away from a job to address a loved one's or our own serious illness, or to welcome a new child into our family. Paid leave makes sense—for workers, families, and businesses. Paid leave policies allow all workers to provide necessary care for themselves and their families, support better health and child development outcomes for workers and children, and ensure the financial stability of workers, their families, and their employers.

Unequal Access to Paid Leave Results in Hardship for Low-Paid Workers

Millions of low-income workers in the United States face a tough choice when a family or medical emergency occurs: miss work and lose vital income, or go without caregiving support. Unlike workers with higher wages who are [more likely to have employer-provided paid leave](#), employees in low-paid jobs often lack access to paid time off. Too often, no paid family and medical leave [leads to job loss](#) for low-paid workers and intensifies financial struggles.

Workers without paid leave are more likely to experience [financial hardship](#), [high stress](#), [difficulties with mental health](#), and [poor physical health](#). Employers face [increased turnover and recruiting costs](#) as a result of people leaving the workforce. Offering paid family and medical leave is not just a benefit for workers: it's an investment in economic stability, [workforce retention](#), and [healthier communities](#).

Federal Support Can Help States Bridge the Gaps in Paid Leave Access

In the absence of a universal, national paid leave policy, state paid leave programs have emerged to bridge the gap for many low-income workers, who have the [least access to employer paid leave](#). Federal policymakers recognize the important role the federal government can play in helping states expand access to paid family leave and harmonize existing programs. Two pending proposals, the More Paid Leave for More Americans Act ([H.R. 3089](#)) and the I-PLAN Act of 2025 ([H.R. 3090](#)), would provide funding and technical assistance to states with paid family and medical leave programs, assisting them in designing and implementing benefits that serve workers in low-paid jobs. By providing grants, guidance, and opportunities for interstate collaboration, these bills would help states strengthen existing programs and create new ones, ensuring more workers can access paid leave and avoid financial strain. This support would enable states to optimize their programs while promoting equity, job stability, and economic security for families.

New State Paid Family Leave Programs Could Benefit Millions of Low-Income Workers

H.R. 3089 and H.R. 3090 incentivize the creation of state paid family leave programs. H.R. 3089 requires workers to have worked 1,250 hours during the previous year in order to be eligible for paid family leave. That is the same standard adopted by the state of Delaware's new [paid leave program](#) (launching in 2026). To assess the potential impact of greater access to paid leave, the Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality examined data on workers in states without state paid leave programs and developed estimates for the number of workers in each state who could be eligible for new paid leave programs with the 1,250 hours standard.

If states without paid leave policies created programs with eligibility criteria similar to Delaware's, more than 140 million workers across 37 states could benefit (see Figure 1). Some examples of how many workers in different states could benefit from new paid leave programs include:

- In Texas, more than **13 million** workers could be eligible.
- In Mississippi, more than **1 million** workers could gain access.
- Georgia and Pennsylvania could both see more than **1.3 million** workers in the bottom third of the earnings distribution be eligible.
- In Iowa, more than **360,000** workers in the bottom third of earners could gain access.
- Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Michigan could all see more than **60% of all low-paid workers** in their state be eligible.

FIGURE 1: Millions of Workers Stand to Gain If States Create New Paid Leave Policies

Total and share of workers potentially eligible for Paid Family Leave if states without paid leave programs adopt new policies using Delaware's eligibility standards.

37 States without Paid Leave	Workers at All Wage Levels			Low-Paid Workers		
	Total number of workers	Number who worked at least 1,250 hours in past 12 months	Percent who worked 1,250 or more hours	Total number of low-paid workers	Number who worked at least 1,250 hours in past 12 months	Percent who worked 1,250 or more hours
Alabama/AL	2,517,848	2,014,061	80%	842,766	573,400	68%
Alaska/AK	407,710	308,601	76%	136,002	89,225	66%
Arizona/AZ	3,842,331	3,033,400	79%	1,286,795	874,338	68%
Arkansas/AR	1,498,885	1,213,578	81%	500,175	355,084	71%
Florida/FL	11,636,991	9,339,864	80%	3,879,151	2,782,380	72%
Georgia/GA	5,877,176	4,700,325	80%	1,967,445	1,351,440	69%
Hawaii/HI	756,237	589,993	78%	252,088	173,494	69%
Idaho/ID	1,043,823	784,857	75%	348,331	215,846	62%
Illinois/IL	6,888,129	5,422,196	79%	2,298,735	1,525,685	66%
Indiana/IN	3,699,990	2,893,723	78%	1,234,544	790,945	64%
Iowa/IA	1,808,130	1,397,150	77%	602,898	363,625	60%
Kansas/KS	1,645,468	1,277,084	78%	548,908	352,820	64%
Kentucky/KY	2,297,067	1,818,871	79%	768,214	508,710	66%
Louisiana/LA	2,244,201	1,788,115	80%	762,022	533,416	70%
Maryland/MD	3,467,609	2,808,044	81%	1,155,896	804,407	70%
Michigan/MI	5,307,728	4,053,102	76%	1,795,668	1,084,088	60%
Minnesota/MN	3,310,393	2,583,014	78%	1,146,189	738,167	64%

Mississippi/MS	1,418,176	1,132,258	80%	473,117	320,506	68%
Missouri/MO	3,336,554	2,626,121	79%	1,113,139	729,366	66%
Montana/MT	625,015	474,991	76%	208,369	136,579	66%
Nebraska/NE	1,135,812	895,375	79%	380,777	245,094	64%
Nevada/NV	1,698,936	1,360,651	80%	566,340	401,802	71%
New Hampshire/NH	833,427	645,039	77%	277,934	176,139	63%
New Mexico/NM	1,055,705	818,971	78%	352,792	243,951	69%
North Carolina/NC	5,789,245	4,597,961	79%	1,930,104	1,320,061	68%
North Dakota/ND	461,068	360,072	78%	153,819	98,391	64%
Ohio/OH	6,354,099	4,958,611	78%	2,118,208	1,316,315	62%
Oklahoma/OK	2,037,718	1,626,798	80%	679,418	465,895	69%
Pennsylvania/PA	7,014,853	5,422,554	77%	2,370,268	1,475,094	62%
South Carolina/SC	2,797,330	2,209,232	79%	940,190	633,263	67%
South Dakota/SD	529,694	408,304	77%	176,585	113,710	64%
Tennessee/TN	3,759,587	2,987,703	79%	1,255,303	846,955	67%
Texas/TX	16,260,137	13,085,963	80%	5,420,182	3,819,693	70%
Utah/UT	1,917,204	1,429,349	75%	639,356	374,282	59%
Vermont/VT	374,051	277,229	74%	132,769	81,411	61%
Virginia/VA	4,807,382	3,844,501	80%	1,602,757	1,079,926	67%
West Virginia/WV	822,979	651,987	79%	274,376	185,891	68%
Wisconsin/WI	3,324,013	2,618,250	79%	1,108,118	704,838	64%
Wyoming/WY	319,274	248,424	78%	106,436	68,711	65%
Total	179,905,404	141,462,376	79%	60,382,255	40,312,837	67%

Note: This analysis is based on GCPI calculations of 2023 American Community Survey data using all workers with earnings over \$0 in the past 12 months. Low-paid workers are defined as workers with wages in the bottom third of the wage distribution.

Source: Georgetown Center on Poverty and Inequality, 2025. Authors' calculations of the [2023 American Community Survey](#).

Paid Family Leave Improves Overall Well-Being

Encouraging more states to adopt paid leave programs would allow the [millions of workers](#) without access to paid leave an option to care for themselves and their families. In fact, our analysis shows that adoption of paid family leave programs with standards similar to Delaware could lead to over 75% of workers becoming eligible in each state. State paid leave programs can directly [reduce inequality](#), ensuring low-paid workers have the same chance to care for a new child as higher-wage workers. Research has demonstrated other positive effects of paid leave, such as:

- Married parents with access to paid leave experience [more marital satisfaction, sleep longer](#), and are [more involved with their children](#).
- Employed mothers of 1–3 year olds increased their usual weekly work hours by [10–17%](#), with a corresponding increase in their wage income.
- California's paid leave program [doubled the average bonding time](#) between new mothers and babies from 3 to 6 weeks and contributed to a 12 percent [reduction of postneonatal mortality](#) and overall improvement to [child health](#).