



May 18, 2023

Chairwoman Carpenter and Members of the House Committee on Labor and Industrial Relations:

We write to express our strong support for HB 596, which would provide eligible employees in Louisiana with paid family and medical leave. This important legislation ensures that people who need time away from work to bond with a new child, recover from a serious health condition, care for a seriously ill loved one, address needs arising from domestic violence, or address the impact of military deployment can take the time they need without the fear of financial instability. We applaud Representative Freeman for championing this important issue.

The United States is one of the only developed nations that does not provide universal paid family leave. Some workers in Louisiana have access to *unpaid* leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), but the FMLA falls far short of covering all employees. Currently, of working adults in Louisiana, only about 53% are eligible for FMLA-leave, and

only 38% are eligible and can afford 6 weeks of unpaid leave.¹ Paid leave is crucial to ensure that workers who need to take leave can afford to do so without sacrificing their paycheck or savings.

Families who have access to paid leave are healthier, more economically secure, and less likely to need public assistance resources.² Currently, the lack of paid leave costs U.S. workers and their families \$22.5 billion each year in lost wages alone.³ An astounding 75% of workers in the U.S. do not have access to paid family leave.⁴ Low-income workers are the least likely to have access to paid family leave, with just 13% of workers in the lowest earnings quartile having access.⁵ When workers do not have the leave they need, they may defer or forego necessary medical treatment.

HB 596 would create a state-administered paid family and medical leave insurance fund that would give workers up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave in a 12-month period. Employers and employees would pay a modest amount into the fund for workers to draw from when a need for paid leave arises.

Paid leave benefits both employees and employers by helping workers address serious health issues and then return ready and able to work. Further, research shows that paid leave increases productivity, decreases employer costs, and increases employee retention, which is especially critical in today's highly competitive labor market.⁶ Polling has also shown that prospective employees are more likely to relocate to states with paid family and medical leave programs.⁷

Establishing a paid family and medical leave insurance program also helps level the field for small businesses. Smaller businesses often cannot afford to offer the same generous leave that larger businesses offer. This creates a disadvantage in hiring. Under HB 596, small businesses that employ fewer than twenty-five employees are not required to pay the employer contribution. This means small businesses will still be able to offer the benefit of paid leave at no additional cost to the business.

With access to paid family and medical leave, workers have better physical and mental health postpartum.⁸ States with paid family medical leave programs have shown health benefits for

¹ Pamela Joshi et al., *Inequitable Access to FMLA Continues*, Diversitydatakids.org (Mar. 1, 2023), <https://www.diversitydatakids.org/research-library/data-visualization/inequitable-access-fmla-continues>.

² A Better Balance, *The Health Case for Paid Family and Medical Leave* (Nov. 30, 2021), <https://www.abetterbalance.org/resources/the-health-case-for-paid-family-and-medical-leave/>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, Mar. 2022, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Table 7 (2023), *accessible at* <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/september-2022-landing-page-employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2022.htm#Glossary>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ A Better Balance, *The Health Case for Paid Family and Medical Leave* (Nov. 30, 2021), <https://www.abetterbalance.org/resources/the-health-case-for-paid-family-and-medical-leave/>.

⁷ Center for Business & Social Justice, *Talent Trends & State Social Policies: 2023 Impact on Businesses in the U.S.* (Feb. 2023), <https://www.bsr.org/files/BSR-Talent-Social-Policies.pdf>.

⁸ A Better Balance, *The Health Case for Paid Family and Medical Leave* (Nov. 30, 2021), <https://www.abetterbalance.org/resources/the-health-case-for-paid-family-and-medical-leave/>.

moms, babies and the family unit. Mothers with access to paid family medical leave have decreased rates of postpartum depression, decreased hospitalizations, and increased rates of breastfeeding.⁹ Paid leave is tied to decreased child and infant mortality as well as decreased hospitalizations due to RSV.¹⁰ Fathers in states with paid family leave report feeling more confident in raising their children and are more involved with the care of their child over time¹¹.

Access to paid leave helps new mothers stay connected to the workforce. In states that have implemented paid leave policies, 20% fewer women leave their jobs in the first year after welcoming a new child into the family, and up to 50% fewer leave after five years according to a recent study by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.¹² For women who do not have access to paid leave, the study found that nearly 30% will drop out of the workforce within a year after welcoming a new child, and one in five women will not return to the workforce for over a decade. Over the long term, paid leave nearly closed the gap in workforce participation between moms of young children and women without minor children, the study found. Women make up nearly half of Louisiana's labor force (48%) and more than one-quarter of its business owners (28%).¹³ If women participated in the Louisiana labor force "at the same rate as women in countries with paid leave, there would be an estimated 95,000 additional workers in the state and \$2.6 billion more wages earned statewide."¹⁴

Eleven states, and Washington D.C., have already enacted legislation to guarantee paid family and medical leave for working families, and several other states are actively considering similar proposals. Across party lines, workers broadly support paid family and medical leave, with significant support among Americans under age 30 (83%) and those between ages 30-44 (79%); support is close to 70% among individuals ages 45-64.¹⁵

HB 596 is about supporting Louisiana businesses and families during the most important, and often most difficult, moments of life. At some point, nearly all of us will either provide care or need it ourselves, whether we are recovering from an illness, welcoming a new child, or caring for an aging parent. We urge you to affirm Louisiana's commitment to promoting healthy workers, supporting small businesses, and strengthening economic security for Louisianans by supporting HB 596, the Louisiana Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefit Act.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ National Partnership for Women and Families. *Fathers Need Paid Family and Medical Leave.* (June 2022), <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/fathers-need-paid-family-and-medical-leave.pdf>

¹² "New Study Reveals Paid Family Leave Policies Lead to 20% Fewer Women Leaving the Workforce," March of Dimes, January 3, 2020. <https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/blog/long-term-economic-benefit-paid-family-leave>

¹³ National Partnership for Women and Families, *Paid Leave Means a Stronger Louisiana*, (January 2023) <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/paid-leave-means-a-stronger-louisiana.pdf>

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Vicki Shabo, *Polling Summary: In Build Back Better, Paid Family and Medical Leave Is One of the Most Popular Policies*, New America (Nov. 10, 2021), <https://www.newamerica.org/better-life-lab/blog/polling-summary-paid-family-and-medical-leave-is-one-of-the-most-popular-planks-in-the-build-back-better-agenda/>.

Sincerely,

10,000 Women
A Better Balance
AARP Louisiana
Agenda for Children
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
Coalition of Louisiana Addiction Services & Prevention Providers
Clover (formerly Kingsley House)
Geaux Far Louisiana
Governor's Advisory Council of Disability Affairs
Lift Louisiana
Louisiana Budget Project
Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families
Louisiana Public Health Institute
March of Dimes
Mary Amelia Center for Women's Health Equity Research at Tulane
National Birth Equity Collaborative
New Orleans Campaign for Grade Level Reading
New Orleans Health Department
New Orleans Maternal Child Health Coalition
New Orleans Youth Alliance
Power Coalition for Equity and Justice
ResourceFull Consulting, LLC
Sexual Trauma Awareness and Response (STAR)
The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
UNITE HERE
United Way of Southeast Louisiana
Workplace Justice Project at Loyola Law Clinic