

September 24, 2019

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE), I urge you to support Senator Schatz's motion to instruct the Senate conferees on S. 1790, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020, when it is considered by the Senate. The motion would direct the conferees to insist upon the inclusion of the House-passed NDAA's provisions to provide paid family leave to federal workers.

Specifically, the provisions incorporate into the NDAA the language of the Federal Employee Paid Leave Act (FEPLA), H.R. 1534/S. 1174, which grants federal workers 12 weeks of: paid parental leave in connection with the birth, adoption or foster placement of a new child; paid family leave to care for an immediate family member with a serious medical condition; paid leave if they are unable to work due to a serious medical condition; paid leave for other purposes that qualify for unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), including for certain military, caregiving and leave purposes.

Paid family leave for federal workers will not only benefit public servants and their families; it will also benefit the government and the nation it serves. This leave reflects the value we place on family and parenting, and it will ensure that the federal government is able to compete with the private-sector for top talent and promote a more productive workforce.

Existing federal sick and annual leave benefits do not meet the needs of today's parents and caregivers. A paid family leave policy would bridge this gap. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, accruing 12 weeks of paid leave for use under the Family and Medical Leave Act would take more than four years from an employee's date of hire.¹ This calculation does not account for any use of sick leave beyond the average use of three days annually. Without adequate accrued leave, workers are forced to make difficult trade-offs between bonding with their new child or caring for a seriously ill family member, and being able to pay their bills and save for their child's future.

Having paid family or parental leave policies have been shown to improve the recruitment of young workers. When deciding whether to accept a job offer, 66 percent of survey respondents said the employer's paid parental leave policy is important, and 20 percent said it was the most important benefit.² Two-thirds of college students say

¹ Miller, Kevin, Allison Suppan Helmuth and Robin Farabee-Siers. "The Need for Paid Parental Leave for Federal Employees: Adapting to a Changing Workforce," *Institute for Women's Policy Research*, iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/wpallimport/files/iwpr-export/publications/A141.pdf, p. 7.

² JustWorks, October 8, 2018, "6 Surprising Statistics About Benefits Employees Want," justworks.com/blog/6-surprising-statistics-benefits-employees-want-infographics.

that balancing work and family is a priority for them.³ Work–family balance is valued by both men and women, especially those with children. In a 2014 study of highly educated professional fathers in the United States, nine out of 10 reported that when looking for a new job, it would be important that the employer offered paid parental leave, and six out of 10 considered it very or extremely important. These numbers were even higher for millennial workers.⁴

With the federal workforce aging, recruitment of young workers is critical. Only 8 percent of the federal workforce is under 30, even though workers in this age bracket make up 24 percent of the total labor force.⁵ With more than 31 percent of the federal workforce eligible to retire within the next five years, the government has major recruitment challenges on the horizon.⁶ Offering paid family leave is a good first step towards meeting them.

The direct cost of the policy is negligible, especially when compared to its benefits, and is mitigated by reduced turnover costs. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that the FEPLA provisions of the House NDAA would increase direct spending by \$22 million over 10 years.⁷ This cost was offset by savings in the House bill and could likewise be offset in the conference agreement. The policy should also result in reduced costs not measured by CBO. The Institute for Women’s Policy Research estimated that the federal government could prevent 2,650 departures per year among female employees by offering paid parental leave, preventing \$50 million per year in turnover costs.⁸ The benefits more than outweigh the costs.

With all these benefits for employers, it makes sense that an increasing number of major private-sector companies offer paid family or parental leave for their employees. As of 2018, the 20 largest private-sector employers in the United States offered some form of paid parental leave to at least some of their employees.⁹ For salaried employees, Starbucks offers 18 weeks of leave for the birth mother and 12 weeks for the other parent; for both salaried and hourly employees, Walmart provides 16 weeks for the primary parent and six for the other parent; Amazon provides 14 weeks for birth mothers and six weeks for the other parent; Netflix allows up to a year of time off; even the men and women of our uniformed military personnel are provided time off following the birth of a child.

³ Miller, Kevin “The Need for Paid Parental Leave,” p. 5.

⁴ U.S. Department of Labor, “[Paternity Leave: Why Parental Leave for Fathers is So Important for Working Families](#).”

⁵ Office of Management and Budget, March 2019, “Analytical Perspectives, FY2020 Budget of the United States of America,” [www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/ap_7_strengthening-fy2020.pdf](#), p. 68.

⁶ U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Strategic Management of Human Capital – High Risk Issue; Issue Summary,” [www.gao.gov/key_issues/strategic_human_capital_management/issue_summary#t=0](#).

⁷ Congressional Budget Office, September 9, 2019, “Letter re: Direct Spending and Revenue Effects of H.R. 2500, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020,” [www.cbo.gov/system/files/2019-09/hr2500aspassed.pdf](#).

⁸ Miller, Kevin “The Need for Paid Parental Leave,” p. 9.

⁹ Miller, Claire Cain. “Lowe’s Joins Other Big Employers in Offering Paid Parental Leave,” *NY Times*, February 1, 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2018/02/01/upshot/lowes-joins-other-big-employers-in-offering-paid-parental-leave.html](#).

It is past time for Congress to follow the lead of major private sector employers, and the rest of the world, and implement a paid family leave policy that not only reflects the value of family, but is also an effective human resource practice.

Finally, I note that the McConnell motion to instruct to be offered side-by-side with the Schatz motion is not relevant to the question at hand – whether to institute a paid family leave policy for federal workers. Rather, the motion would promote alternative policies, such as tax incentives, for the private-sector. Tax incentives, of course, do not affect an entity, like the federal government, that is not taxed. The only way for Congress to promote paid family leave for its federal employees is to offer it to them.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote for Senator Schatz's motion to instruct the Senate conferees on S. 1790, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020, when it is considered by the Senate this week.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions or comments, please contact NARFE's Director of Legislative and Political Affairs John Hatton at 571-483-1267 or jhatton@narfe.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Thomas', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ken Thomas
National President