

A Year in Review:

EXPLORING PAID FAMILY LEAVE



December 2024

Overview

The United States stands alone among wealthy nations as one of only six countries worldwide without a national paid maternity leave policy. This gap in support has significant consequences for working Americans, with 25 percent of all workers returning to work within ten days of giving birth. In our own state, 76 percent of Ohio workers have jobs without access to paid family leave. In place of comprehensive policy, the U.S. offers a patchwork of limited options that leaves many families without solutions. Paid family leave does more than support parent-child bonding; it is linked to significant improvements in physical health and overall well-being and reduced infant mortality rates, especially for individuals and families of color and those living in poverty. Momentum is growing nationwide, with individual states increasingly enacting paid leave policies in the absence of a federal policy. Although Ohio lags

behind many of its counterparts, awareness and support for paid leave continue to build.

Groundwork Ohio is a statewide policy advocacy organization with a mission to champion high-quality early learning and healthy development strategies from the prenatal period to age five, laying a strong foundation for Ohio's children, families, and communities. Given our focus on early childhood development, we have approached this work through the lens of paid family leave. We recognize that caregiving leave, personal medical leave, and other types of paid leave are essential components of a comprehensive paid leave system that supports families in diverse ways. However, this report highlights our findings and recommendations after a year of research centered on paid family leave for all Ohioans.

This project was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the foundation but reflect those of Groundwork Ohio alone.

Our Process

Phase 1: Feedback and Stakeholder Engagement

TWENTY INTERVIEWS were conducted with experts from diverse industries across the state, including local chambers of commerce, government agencies, business owners, direct practice professionals, non-profit leadership and more.

A SURVEY collected stories from real families to better understand how well existing paid leave structures are working. Responses from **70** individuals across **35** unique industries highlighted valuable perspectives.

- 50% of respondents reported they returned to work sooner than they wanted to because of financial strain.
- 25% of respondents were not compensated during their leave, and 30% reported they exhausted their vacation balance in exchange for compensation during leave.
- In the absence of a paid leave policy, 7 respondents quit their jobs to give birth and care for their infant.

Phase 2: External Education and Collaboration

External Education

Expanding education on paid family leave is critical to pursuing solutions. Education was a core component of our work on this issue and we placed significant value in creating tangible resources for a diverse audience, from policymakers to individual families.

- Groundwork Ohio's report, *The Case for Paid Family Leave in Ohio*, received widespread attention from our statewide audience and was featured in the news three times.
- Our [webinar](#), *Paid Family Leave for All Ohioans: A Path to Healthier Families and Communities*, features a depth of knowledge and expertise in this policy area.

Collaboration

A temporary Paid Family Leave Workgroup brought together experts across sectors to deepen our shared understanding of how to make Paid Family Leave a reality for all Ohioans. Over the course of the Workgroup's convenings, we sought external insight and feedback from both statewide and national advocates on this issue.

"...We were under a huge amount of financial strain due to exhausting all my available PTO, as I had a high risk pregnancy and had to be on bed rest the last 6 weeks."

"I used all of my vacation time, all of my sick time, and then used remaining short-term disability to fulfill a 12 week leave. It then left me with no time off."

"[I] decided to quit after the unpaid 6 weeks leave because I was not fully healed nor ready to return."

Paid Family Leave Workgroup Snapshot

- 16** participants, across
- 14** organizations
- 5** working sessions
- 4** formal recommendations for future advancement

Phase 3: Construct a Final Set of Recommendations

Building on insights gathered throughout the year, we developed recommendations with the cross-sector Workgroup to drive the advancement of paid family leave policy and begin to identify Groundwork's role in the ongoing movement.

Our Work in Context

Groundwork Ohio is data-informed and fact-driven, focusing on four primary policy priorities as the most critical to supporting positive outcomes for young children and families.

Paid Family Leave has potential to positively impact families across all four policy priorities.



- Early Learning & Child Care
- Health Care Access & Quality
- Early Childhood Trauma Prevention
- Economic Stability

Early Learning & Child Care

Infant care is not only scarcer than child care for older children, especially in underserved and historically disinvested communities, but is also incredibly expensive. The average annual cost for infant care is approximately the same as the cost of in-state tuition at a public university.^{iv} What's more, most child care centers do not admit infants into their programs until the child is at least 6 weeks old.^v

*** Paid Family Leave creates an economically viable option for families to take time away from work to care for their infant, minimizing dependence on expensive child care.**

Health Care Access & Quality

4 in 10 low-income babies aren't accessing necessary preventative care at well-visits, with significantly lower rates of participation for parents in low-income households.^{vi}

*** Paid Family Leave increases the likelihood of preventive screening participation and increases time for the birthing parent to recover. Paid family leave is directly related to increased length of time breastfeeding and is an important policy lever to influence reduction of infant mortality.^{vii}**

Early Childhood Trauma Prevention

Ohio ranks 31st of all 50 states and D.C. for infant maltreatment.^{vi} Babies and their primary caregiver(s) are inextricably linked, meaning the mental health and emotional well-being of infants' primary caregivers are a significant factor influencing an infant's brain development.

*** Paid Family Leave is strongly associated with decreased postpartum depression and decreased incidents of intimate partner violence due to lower rates of overall stress.^{viii}**

Economic Stability

1 in 5 of Ohio's young children live in poverty, placing Ohio's rank at 39th of all 50 states and D.C. for early childhood poverty.^{vi}

*** Paid Family Leave increases family economic stability, housing security, and food security by meaningfully decreasing poverty. These economic supports reduce enrollment in public benefits overall, with a 40% enrollment reduction in subsidized nutrition programs.^{ix}**

Accomplishments

Systems change is a gradual journey, unfolding over years and marked by meaningful progress along the way. In the span of one year, Groundwork Ohio is proud to celebrate several key achievements:

- The inclusion of Paid Family Leave in our Public Policy Agenda.
- Establishing an internal Paid Parental Leave policy for Groundwork Ohio employees.
- Publishing Ohio's first in-depth report focused exclusively on Paid Family Leave.
- Engaging with stakeholders and policymakers to share education on the benefits of Paid Family Leave.
- Engaging with local communities who are organizing a broader statewide coalition focused on paid leave efforts.

Moving Forward: Our Recommendations

While we have many accomplishments to celebrate over the past year, we also look forward with determination and vision for the work that lies ahead. **With contributions from the Paid Family Leave Workgroup, Groundwork Ohio is proud to present the following recommendations to make Paid Family Leave a reality for all Ohioans.**

Engage in Continued Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Build a diverse coalition centered in geographic, racial and ethnic diversity.
- Intentionally build inclusion with industries likely to oppose paid leave as a public benefit, such as business and insurance sectors.
- Groundwork has been building up unique key audiences including local elected officials, business owners, and women through the Women's Coalition.

Make an Education Campaign a Core Focus

- Build awareness of the benefits of paid family leave policy as a possibility, emphasizing its power to impact children and families during the first five years of life.
- Analyze anticipated opposition arguments and tailor education to combat misinformation.

Develop a Strong Communications Strategy

- Collaborate with experts to tailor messaging for a variety of audiences, including lawmakers, voters, business owners, and more.
- Include communication centered in the benefits of paid leave, such as benefits to individual health, communities, and society at large.

Use Emerging Data to Convey the Need & Opportunities

- Leverage timely and accurate data to demonstrate benefits to the state economy and return on investment.
- Utilize data to demonstrate the impact of paid leave policy.

IN CONCLUSION, the findings from our year-long exploration into Paid Family Leave in Ohio underscore the urgent need for policy reform. The current landscape leaves many families—especially those from marginalized communities—without the support they need, jeopardizing both economic stability and overall well-being. Our recommendations emphasize the importance of cross-sector collaboration, targeted education, and effective communication to build a diverse coalition advocating for paid leave for all Ohioans. By advancing these initiatives, we can create a healthier, more equitable future for Ohio's young children and families.

Sources:

ⁱKlerman, J. A., Daley, K., & Pozniak, A. (2012). *Family and medical leave in 2012: Technical report*. Abt Associates Inc.

ⁱⁱTebben, S. (2024, February 12). *Paid leave still inaccessible to majority of Ohioans*. Ohio Capital Journal.

ⁱⁱⁱSolomon, J. (2021). *Closing the coverage gap would improve Black maternal health*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

^{iv}Child Care Aware. (n.d.). *Price of child care in Ohio*. Child Care Aware of America.

^v*Paid family leave: How much time is enough?* (2017). New America.

^{vi}2023 *Early Childhood Dashboard*. (2023). Groundwork Ohio.

^{vii}Khan, M. S. (2020). *Paid family leave and children health outcomes in OECD countries*. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 116, 105259.

^{viii}Hidalgo-Padilla, L., et al. (2023). *Association between maternity leave policies and postpartum depression: a systematic review*. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 26(5), 571–580.

^{ix}Innovation Ohio. (n.d.). *Determining the long-term savings and short-term costs of paid parental leave: A guide for cities and employers*.