

Issue of paid parental leave: us companies



Abstract:

Paid parental leave is one of the most beneficial supports a nation can provide for their families. This practice allows families from all income levels to spend time at home raising their infant after the birth of their child. Currently, the United States has one of the least supportive family leave laws of all developed nations, guaranteeing only twelve weeks of unpaid leave only if the employee works in the public sector or in a company over fifty employees large (US DoL, 2009). This policy should be changed to match the supportive policies of other developed nations, like Finland, that provide extended paid leave to their new and growing families (Weller, 2016). Luckily, there are many groups in the United States that are pushing for better policies. One of these groups are companies that are showing that companies are already capable of providing comprehensive paid leave (Jackson, 2018). Another group are activists. Activists work to increase public knowledge on the subject and push politicians to vote in favor of supportive laws (PL+US, 2019). Finally, politicians have the final say on the laws that get passed, so they are arguably the most influential group (Vesoulis, 2019). However, each of these groups cohabitates the space of paid leave initiatives, meaning that each group participates in an intricate push and pull on the topic. Eventually, the goal is to bring the laws of the United States into the twenty first century by including paid parental leave as mandatory for all companies across all fifty states.

Companies in the United States all operate within governmental limitations regarding parental leave. Some companies are large enough that they can allow employees to have such leave after birth of their child. However, this

critical period of growth and learning can be interrupted when one or both of the parents are unable to gain leave from work in order to intimately raise the child (Ruhm, 2007). This is the problem that Americans are facing with the current state of parental leave. The current state of parental leave in the United States needs to be improved to provide equal benefits to all and to keep up with the standard that other developed nations have set. Luckily there are some companies, politicians, and activist groups already pushing for change.

Early childhood care is one of the most important pieces of raising an intelligent and emotionally stable child. However, the United States only guarantees 12 weeks of unpaid leave for employees of public sectors or companies with fifty or more employees (U. S. DoL., 2009). There are other stipulations on that as well. For example, the employee must “ have worked for their employer at least twelve months, at least 1250 hours” (U. S. DoL, 2009). This proves to be a problem for people that work at smaller companies or who recently switched employers. These laws also only suit people that are financially stable enough to support one or two parents off of work for three months as well as all the expenses that come with a having a newborn. Additionally, if a person experiences complication during pregnancy and has to take time off for medical reasons, that will count against their allotted twelve weeks. Thus, these laws put forth by the United States Department of Labor severely disadvantage several groups, including the poor and women. Therefore, change needs to be affected in order to bring about equality and help the youth of America prosper.

There are many ways that the United States can improve their parental leave policies in order to better support all types of families. Although parental leave laws in the United States are equal between men and women, those in individual companies are not. In companies that provide the benefit of paid parental leave, one of the most staggering discrepancies is the amount of time that women are allowed as compared to men (PL+US, 2019). Due to the patriarchal structure of the US, women are seen as the sole primary caregivers for their newborns. However, fathers are equally as important in the lives of their babies. Being able to have both parents at home reduces the stress of both parents compared to if only the mother was home. Additionally, when fathers are able to be home with their infants, it provides benefits to companies since it increases employee retention rates (Tulane, 2019). There are already some states that provide mandatory paid parental leave. The state on the forefront of this movement is California, which provides “ up to six weeks of paid leave to care for a newborn, newly adopted child, or foster care-placed child” (NPWF, 2018). Although these laws are not perfect, this shows that providing paid paternal leave is possible in the United States. In order to gain more inspiration for policy changes that can be implemented nationwide, one can simply look at the policies employed by other developed countries. One of the most progressive countries is Finland. This nation truly prioritizes the emotional and financial wellbeing of their families and future generations. The government subsidizes paid maternity leave starting seven weeks before the mothers due date and for sixteen weeks after birth. They also provide eight weeks of paid paternal leave (Weller, 2016). This time off is subsidized regardless of the parents’ occupation. Since these parents have paid leave, it allows both parents to be

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fully present during the most critical period of their child's life without any looming stress about work or money. The United States can learn much from the positive example set by Finland and other countries like it.

There are already many groups on the forefront of the effort to improve family leave laws in the United States. One of the major groups are companies that prove how achievable it is to provide comprehensive family leave policies. Some examples include Spotify, which provides six months of paid leave to any gender of parent, or Etsy, which includes twenty-six week paid parental leave for all of their employees (Jackson, 2018). These companies are not only directly benefiting the lives of new parents at their own companies, but they are also leading the charge to put paid parental leave into law. There are also independent activist groups that are supporting these laws. One of the most prolific group is PL+US, or Paid Leave + United States. This group utilizes facts and figures to gather awareness for the positive impact of family involvement in childhood early development. They also run petitions and grassroots organized campaigns to pressure different companies and politicians to change their stances on paid parental leave (PL+US, 2019). Activist groups work to both educate the public as well as create consumer and voter pressure behind agendas supporting this important change. Finally, the most impactful players in paid parental leave are politicians. Their actions, initiatives, and votes have the final say as to whether change will or will not be affected at the governmental level. There are increasing forces in the government that are suggesting that paid parental leave is not far off on the horizon. These politicians are the cornerstones of the paid parental leave movement as all of the

governmental power rests in their hands. Yet, each of these players act on each other, giving and taking pushes to get paid parental leave laws on the books.

The United States is one of the only developed countries in the world that does not have mandatory paid parental leave for all parents with newborn babies. There are numerous examples across the globe of how these laws could be implemented in the United States; examples from which companies, activists, and politicians all draw. Implementing paid parental leave would provide access to child raising opportunities not previously accessible for the poor who could not afford to take unpaid leave from work, fathers whose time allowed was less than for mothers, and women whose pregnancy complications would be counted against their available maternity leave. As one of the last developed nations to lack this provision, the United States is not only falling behind its worldwide competitors in progressivity, it is also not providing the best quality of life for its citizens. Paid parental leave should be a right in all nations in order to support healthy childhood development and positive family structures.

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