

**Background on H.R. 626
The Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave
Act of 2009**

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Talking Points for H.R. 626, the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act

The federal government lags behind the private sector in providing paid parental leave.

- Most people would be surprised to learn that the federal government does not currently provide any paid parental leave for its employees. Employees must cobble together accrued annual and sick leave if they want to receive a paycheck while they are out. This practice may work for the lucky worker who never gets sick (and never has to miss work to care for a sick child or aging parent), but it is unrealistic for most families.
- As the nation's largest employer, with over 1.8 million employees nationwide, the federal government should be a leader in family-friendly workplace policy. Right now, we're lagging behind.
- 75 percent of Fortune 100 Companies provide paid leave to new mothers. The median length of leave is six to eight weeks.
- Most Congressional offices offer paid family leave: 80 percent of House offices offer 7.6 weeks of paid family leave and 96 percent of Senate offices offer 6.1 weeks of paid leave.
- The lack of paid parental leave puts federal agencies far behind what is common in every other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nation.

Paid leave will help the federal workforce recruit and retain the best possible workforce.

- The federal government is struggling to recruit and retain a qualified workforce. While we cannot compete with salaries in the private sector, we should be able to provide comparable, if not better, benefits.
- The federal workforce is aging, indicating difficulty recruiting younger workers. The average age of federal workers increased from 43.6 years to 46.7 years from 1994-2004. Family-friendly benefits could help attract younger workers.

Paid leave is a key source of economic security for struggling working families.

- Most families no longer have a stay-at-home parent to care for a new child and they can't afford to forgo pay for any length of time.
- The typical family spends nearly \$11,000 on expenses for an infant such as food, clothing, health care, and child care, according to estimates by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

- A general lack of infant care requires that working parents take leave to care for their newborn. Government-sponsored day care facilities, for example, typically do not care for infants younger than 10 to 12 weeks old.
- An economic downturn is the worst time to ask parents to choose between their job and their new child. Losing either parent's salary poses real hardships for working families, especially in the face of thousands of dollars of extra baby expenses, rapidly rising costs, and disappearing savings.

Paid leave is cost-effective for the employer. In the case of the federal government, this means that paid leave is cost-effective for taxpayers.

- New parents with access to paid leave when their first child is born are more likely to stay with their employer than those who do not. Reducing turnover is a key cost-saver, because turnover is more expensive than providing paid leave. The average cost of turnover is about 20 percent of an employee's annual salary, while four weeks of paid leave is less than 8 percent of an employee's salary.
- In addition to reducing turnover, paid parental leave can lead to increased productivity by reducing absenteeism and improving employee morale.

Fact Sheet for H.R. 626, the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2009

What H.R. 626 does

- This bill would provide 4 weeks of paid leave to Federal Employees for the birth or adoption of a child.

Current Practice

- The federal government does not offer any paid time off specifically for the purposes of caring for an infant or newly-adopted child
- Currently, federal employees who give birth to or adopt a child and need paid time off have the option of using their accrued sick days and vacation time. This means that employees must save up their leave time in the years leading up to having a child.
- Requiring that employees cobble together accrued leave makes it difficult for many to save up enough time for a paid leave. Relatively new employees or those who experience health problems are particularly poorly-served by the current policy.

Who Benefits

- Federal workers in all three branches of government who are eligible for unpaid family leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) will benefit from FEPPLA.
- The federal government is the country's largest employer, with over 1.8 million employees. Federal employees can be found across the country, in a wide range of jobs. Most of these employees earn modest salaries – nearly half earn less than \$60,000 annually, and 19 percent earn less than the national median full-time wage.
- The American taxpayer will benefit from FEPPLA, because providing paid leave encourages a more productive and efficient workforce. Paid leave reduces employee turnover and absenteeism, and boosts employee morale, all of which combine to make for a more productive workforce. Moreover, while the federal government strives to be a “model employer,” we currently lag behind other large employers, most of whom offer some form of paid leave. The federal government cannot compete with private-sector salaries, but we should be able to offer comparable or superior benefits, which will help recruit and retain the best and brightest to serve the American people.

Why We Need this Bill

Paid leave is an economic lifeline for working families.

- In an economic downturn like the one we're experiencing, families are less able than ever to afford to have either a mother or a father forego their paycheck. With 11.6 million Americans out of work, many families who once struggled to make ends meet on two incomes are now scrambling to stay afloat on just one paycheck.
- The current federal employee leave policy may work for the lucky families who never get sick or never need a vacation. But even the best-prepared new parents face difficult choices when child care needs arise – many are forced to choose between their child and their paycheck.
- A middle class family spends nearly \$11,000 on expenses for an infant such as food, clothing, health care, and child care, according to estimates by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- A general lack of infant care requires that working parents take leave to care for their newborn. Government-sponsored day care facilities, for example, typically do not care for infants younger than 10 to 12 weeks old.

Paid leave is an investment in children's physical, cognitive, and behavioral health.

- Paid leave is good for children. Experts in child development tell us that mothers need time to recover from childbirth, and that mothers and fathers alike need time to care for and bond with a new baby. If we as a country truly value families, then we need new policies and investments that support our working families and set our children on a path for success early in life.

Paid leave will help the federal government recruit and retain the best possible workforce.

- The lack of paid parental leave means federal agencies fail to compete with the benefits packages provided by top-tier U.S. firms.
- Paid parental leave will improve recruitment and retention for federal agencies. This is especially important now, because the federal workforce is aging and in need of aggressive recruitment of precisely the younger workers who will most benefit from paid parental leave.
- The U.S. is the *only* industrialized country that does not provide income support for all workers with a new child, which means that we lag behind our global competitors.

Support

- Organizations that support the bill include: The National Partnership for Women and Families, The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Moms Rising, and Federally Employed Women.

History of the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act

The current form of the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act was introduced on April 14, 2008 as H.R. 5781 by Representatives Carolyn B. Maloney, Steny H. Hoyer, and Tom Davis. House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Henry Waxman and Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia Chairman Danny Davis helped move the bill to the floor. Senators Jim Webb and John Warner introduced companion legislation in the Senate as S. 3140.

During Subcommittee consideration of H.R. 5781, the bill was amended to provide four weeks of paid parental leave, instead of the eight weeks in the original bill. H.R. 5781 passed the House of Representatives on June 16, 2008, by a 278-146 vote. Shortly afterwards, the White House issued a statement indicating that then President Bush's advisors would recommend that he veto the bill. The Statement of Administration Policy argued that the measure "would provide a costly, unnecessary new paid leave entitlement."

The bill was introduced in the Senate following its passage in the House. Subsequently, it was referred to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia on July 21, 2008. However, action in the Senate was not completed before the last session of the 110th Congress.

Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney reintroduced the bill on January 22, 2009, along with Representatives Frank Wolf, Steny Hoyer, Danny K. Davis, and Edolphus Towns. The current version of the bill reflects the amendment providing for four weeks of paid leave. In the 111th Congress the Federal Employee Paid Parental Leave Act is numbered H.R. 626. Senator Jim Webb reintroduced the bill as S. 354. Original co-sponsors included Senators Cardin, Mikulski, Menendez, McCaskill, Casey, Gillibrand, Kerry, Lautenberg, Lieberman, Sanders, and Stabenow.

Q&A on the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act (H.R. 626)

Coverage

Q: Who is covered by FEPLA?

A: All employees of the federal government who are eligible for 12 weeks of unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act. Employees must have been with their current employer for at least a year, and have logged at least 1,250 hours in the past year.

Q: Who is NOT covered by FEPLA?

A:

- DC government employees
- temporary employees
- part-time employees who work less than 1,250 hours in a year
- postal workers
- The military
- The Federal Aviation Administration
- Panama Canal Commission employees employed in Panama
- presidential appointees
- employees of a corporation controlled by the Farm Credit Administration
- alien employees who work outside the U.S., except a chief of mission as defined by the Foreign Service Act of 1980

Q: Who is covered in the legislative branch?

A: All employees of the House and Senate (including Members' personal offices and Committee Staff), Capitol Guide Service, Capitol Police, Congressional Budget Office, Office of the Architect of the Capitol, Office of the Attending Physician, Office of Compliance, the Office of Technology Assessment, Library of Congress, and the Government Accountability Office.

Q: In the legislative branch, Member and Committee offices make their own vacation and sick leave policies. Why wouldn't they continue to make their own parental leave policies?

A: Member and Committee offices do not make their own *unpaid* parental leave policy. As a result of the Congressional Accountability Act, FMLA applies to the legislative branch, including Member and Committee offices. This new benefit is based on FMLA leave, so it is natural that it would apply to Member and Committee offices the way FMLA does.

A: If Congress is going to set this standard for the rest of the federal government, they should follow it themselves.

A: This policy is consistent with the length of leave already offered by many House and Senate offices, and some offices exceed the standard proposed in this legislation.

Q: In looking at the bill, GAO and Library of Congress employees are listed separately from the rest of the Legislative Branch. Why?

A: GAO and LOC employees are considered differently for the purpose of leave in the existing laws. They are eligible for FMLA, but it is applied in a different statute, so it is necessary to create a separate section of the bill to ensure that they are eligible for the four weeks of paid parental leave.

Q: Why isn't the postal service covered?

A: Postal employees are excluded from the Title V definition of "employee" and are therefore treated differently for the purpose of benefits than other federal employees. Their union negotiates for their benefits, unlike other federal employee unions.

Q: If and when this bill is implemented, will it be retroactive for people who have recently had children or are currently expecting a new child and did not receive paid leave?

A: No. It will only affect people who take leave six months after the bill is signed into law.

Q: Is a parent eligible to take this leave at any point in their child's life?

A: FMLA leave for the birth or adoption of a child must be taken within one year of the birth or adoption. For a birth, the leave must be taken for the purpose of caring for the child (i.e. if a parent waits to take leave until the child is 6 months old, it must be to care for the child, they cannot take it if the child is in daycare).

Q: In the case of an adoption, is the leave only available to parents who adopt a baby, or are adoptive parents of older children eligible for this leave?

A: This leave is available to parents who adopt a child of any age, within one year of the adoption. No matter how old the child, there is still a period of adjustment for the family.

Q. Why does this bill not cover members of the Armed Forces?

A: The Armed Forces are not covered by FMLA and set their own leave policies. In the Armed Forces, new mothers are provided with six weeks of paid convalescence leave for a normal birth and more leave if they have complications. At this time, Marines receive 10 days of paternity leave. Other military fathers are not provided with leave, but are encouraged to use their accrued vacation. In May, the Senate Armed Services Committee voted to give new fathers 21 days of paternity leave after their children are born or within 60 days of fathers' return from deployment; this bill is now pending in the Senate.

Q: Do Armed Forces personnel get paid time off when they adopt a new child?

A: Yes, Armed Forces personnel receive three weeks of paid leave when they adopt a child. If both parents are in the Armed Forces, however, the family will not receive a total of six weeks of leave, but only three weeks of paid adoption leave.

Cost

Q: What will this cost the federal government?

A: The Congressional Budget Office estimates that this bill will cost \$190 million in the first full year of implementation. There are no pay-go considerations. The Joint Economic Committee estimates that this is equal to less than one tenth of one percent of total federal payrolls.

A: For the most part, it is not likely that agencies will hire temps to replace workers on leave. Rather, they will need to deal with the management issue of how to cope in the employee's absence.

A: There are a number of important ways that providing paid parental leave will save the federal agencies money that are not included in CBO's cost estimate. The agencies will retain more employees, which will save turnover costs, aid in recruitment, and improve productivity and employee morale. The Joint Economic Committee estimates that it costs nearly three times as much to replace an employee than to provide them with four weeks of paid parental leave. As Daniel Beard, Chief Administrative Officer of the U.S. House of Representatives noted, "I would even argue that this approach saves money. Employee morale is always greater when an employer treats employees with dignity."

Q: How can legislation that costs \$190 million be pay-go neutral? Won't the agencies need more money to implement this?

A: H.R. 626 is pay-go neutral: CBO states that enacting the bill "would not affect direct spending or receipts." In their score of the bill, CBO estimates that the \$190 million is the amount that the agencies currently save on salaries when federal employees who have a new child take their unpaid leave, as they are entitled to under FMLA. The Joint Economic Committee estimates that this is equal to about less than one-tenth of one percent of the federal payroll.

Q: Should we be extending benefits for federal workers when in the economy is in a recession?

A: Having a child is a joyous event, but it can impose economic hardships on families, especially if parents cannot take paid leave. Most families with children have two working parents, and mothers' salaries typically account for over a third of a family's income. Losing either parent's salary poses real hardships for working families, especially in the face of thousands of dollars of

extra baby expenses, rising costs, stagnant wages, and disappearing savings. Now, more than ever, families need to keep parents employed and this bill will help to do that.

A: For families, there could not be a worse time to ask parents to choose between their job and their new child than during an economic downturn. Families would lose income at a time when costs are rising and jobs are hard to come by. Those that end up leaving a job because of family responsibilities will find that getting a new job is difficult to do: nearly one-in-five unemployed workers have been actively searching for work for at least 6 months, the unemployment rate is at a 25-year high, and nearly 4 unemployed workers are competing for every 1 job opening.

Current Practice

Q: Don't federal employees already have the best compensation packages in the nation?

A: Federal employees may have had the best compensation packages in the 1950s, but not today. In a recent survey, the Chief Administrative Officer of the House found that the federal workforce is not "benefits-rich": the federal defined benefit plan and retiree health insurance are highly ranked, but the federal government falls short on the benefits desired by younger, working families.¹

Q: What parental leave benefits do federal workers have now?

A: Currently, Federal employees do not have any paid leave for the birth or adoption of a child. Federal employees are eligible for 12 weeks of job-protected unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) once they have met the job tenure requirements (one year with their employer and having logged at least 1,250 hours over the past year), although workers often cannot afford to take advantage of this leave. Currently, the only way for federal workers to receive pay for parental leave is to use accrued paid sick days and vacation time. In contrast, according to a Joint Economic Committee report, 75% of Fortune 100 companies typically offer women at least six weeks of paid maternity leave.

A: Federal contractors can be reimbursed for providing paid parental leave. For example, recipients of research grants through the National Institutes of Health are permitted to provide themselves and their employees up to 30 days of paid parental leave. Surely if such practice is suitable for contractors and grantees, it is reasonable for federal employees as well.

Why We Need this Benefit

Q: Why is it important to provide paid leave to federal employees? Wouldn't it only help people in Washington, DC?

¹ Daniel Beard, "Investing in the Future of the Federal Workforce: Paid Parental Leave Improves Recruitment and Retention," Testimony before the Joint Economic Committee and the Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, March 6, 2008.

A: The Federal Government is the country's largest employer, with over 1.8 million employees. In the current economic crisis, it is also one of the most important sources of secure jobs. Federal employees can be found across the country, in a wide range of occupations. Providing paid parental leave would help not only Washington-DC-based employees, but also federal workers nationwide. Only one-in-six (16 percent) of Federal employees are employed in the Washington, DC area. Thus, paid leave would help workers in every state during these difficult economic times. (For a list of federal employees by state and Congressional District, visit: http://maloney.house.gov/index.php?option=com_issues&task=view_issue_docs&issue=263&Itemid=35)

A: As the nation's largest employer, the Federal Government should be the leader in family-friendly workplace policy. The Federal Government should provide benefits that are as good as the "best practices" in the private sector. Research by the JEC has found that Fortune 100 firms offer paid leave that typically lasts 6 to 8 weeks.² This is also consistent with the amount of leave typically offered by Congressional offices.

A: This legislation will help the federal agencies recruit and retain younger workers, which is important because the federal workforce is aging and agencies have been unable to recruit younger workers. In 2004, new federal hires were 2.5 years older than they were a decade ago.³ While the federal workforce has excellent benefits for older workers, benefits for younger workers with young families are comparatively meager. The federal agencies compete for the best workers against companies who offer paid leave: three-quarters of Fortune 100 companies offer women at least 6 weeks of paid maternity leave.

A: Economic downturns are the worst time for a worker to lose a job. Federal employees who leave work because of inflexible family leave policies are unlikely to find new jobs quickly in the current economic crisis. Rising unemployment means that many former dual-income families are struggling to get by on just one salary. At times like these, it is more important than ever that the federal government support its workers by ensuring that they can take care of their financial, medical, and other basic needs as well as those of their families.

Q: Doesn't the current system work well? Is this really necessary?

A: The current system is flawed. It forces healthy, long-term employees to save up their sick days and vacation time so they can use this paid time off to receive wage replacement during their FMLA parental leave. Requiring that employees cobble together accrued leave makes it difficult for many to save up enough time for parental leave, a problem that is particularly salient for relatively new employees and those who experience health problems.

² Joint Economic Committee, *Paid Family Leave at Fortune 100 Companies: A Basic Standard, but Still Not the Gold Standard*, March 2008.

³ United States Office of Personnel Management, *Federal Workforce Overview FY1994-FY2004*, p. 4.

A: Further, using all of one's sick and vacation time for parental leave risks leaving federal employees without paid sick days available when they need them. A new baby typically requires multiple visits to the doctor, and young children are prone to catching colds and flu. Yet, if employees use their paid sick days for parental leave, they are left with few options when they or their family actually gets ill.

A: The absence of a paid leave policy means that federal employees who have been unable to accrue sufficient paid time off for a parental leave are left with only unpaid leave, which they may not be able to afford to use. Research has found that over three-quarters (77.6 percent) of those who do not exercise their right to leave under the FMLA report that one reason they did not take leave was because they could not afford to go without pay.

A: Some employees may be able to accrue enough annual and sick leave to take paid leave for their first child, but then might not have enough to have a second child soon after, because they used most or all of it the first time, or for healthcare for their child, as babies and young children are sick often and require a number of well-visits throughout the first two years of life.

A: Federal Government benefits sometimes need to be updated to keep pace with society. In 1951, Congress enacted the Annual and Sick Leave Act, to set the standard for accumulation of annual and sick leave for federal employees. In 1978 the Civil Service Reform Act set guidelines for employee labor organizations, to better balance management rights and worker protections. We now need to update the federal benefits package once again to catch up with the growing number of families with two working parents.

A: All of our economic rivals provide paid parental leave, as do nearly all other nations in the world. The OECD countries now provide an average of 18 months of childbirth-related leave, much of it paid.

A: Paid parental leave will reduce turnover and save the federal government money. Turnover costs are more expensive than the cost of paying for 4 weeks of paid leave.

A: Paid parental leave will help recruitment and retention of younger workers, both pressing problems for the federal government. The federal workforce is aging faster than the workforce overall and recruitment of younger workers has been weak. Benefits prized by younger workers, such as paid parental leave, are offered by private sector employers, but not by the federal government.⁴ The federal government cannot compete with private-sector salaries, but we should be able to offer comparable or superior benefits.

Q: Many federal workers are not of child-bearing age, or some choose not to have children. Do they benefit from this at all? Is this discriminatory against them?

⁴ Daniel Beard, "Investing in the Future of the Federal Workforce: Paid Parental Leave Improves Recruitment and Retention," Testimony before the Joint Economic Committee and the Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, March 6, 2008.

A: While some federal workers will never need to use this benefit, all workers understand the need for time off to address family or health concerns.

A: The benefit is available to all federal employees, whether or not they choose to use it. There are employees who may never need to use a sick day, but that does not mean that offering sick leave to all employees is discriminatory.

A: This policy benefits children, who will contribute to our future productivity, competitiveness, and success.

Gender Parity

Q: Why is this benefit necessary for both mothers and fathers?

A: Providing parental leave to only women reinforces inaccurate, outdated gender stereotypes, and could potentially raise legal equal protection issues. Traditional gender roles are falling by the wayside as many more men are becoming involved caregivers for their children.

A: FMLA parental leave is available to both mothers and fathers. As this bill seeks to substitute pay for part of the unpaid FMLA leave, it follows that it would apply to both men and women as the current law does.

A: Children and mothers benefit from fathers taking time to care for and bond with a new child and tend to a recovering spouse.

Contingency Plans

Q: How will government agencies cope with the increased absences?

A: Government agencies already make adjustments to accommodate employees who take unpaid FMLA leave. They shift responsibilities, and plan ahead, since parental leave is foreseeable. With careful human resource management, agencies should be able to accommodate this leave.

Q: Is there a limit to how many times an employee can use this benefit? If an employee wants to have multiple children, is there a certain period of time that they have to wait?

A: Just like the FMLA, there is no limit on how many times over the course of employment that one person could use this leave. The benefit can only be used once in the span of one year, however.

A: There is no waiting period in between children, other than the stipulation that the leave can only be used once in a year's time. But many employees may choose to combine their paid parental leave with some accrued leave to get the majority of their FMLA leave paid, and therefore may wait to have another child until they have accumulated enough leave.

Statement of Administration Policy of 2008: Q & A

Q. In 2008 the Bush Administration claimed that federal workers have adequate options to obtain paid parental leave through accumulated sick and annual leave, leave transfer and bank programs. Was this an accurate statement?

A. Federal employees are only able to accumulate a maximum of 30 days (6 weeks) of annual leave which is not an adequate amount of time for purposes of providing care to a newborn or a newly adopted child.

A. Early in their careers, when they are earning only 13 or 20 days per year, accumulating even 30 days is nearly impossible, yet the early years of one's career coincide with the years when employees are most likely to become parents. For adoptive parents, this leave is often used up in the many trips and appointments that precede adoption.

A. Under current law, federal employees are prohibited from using sick days to pay for part of the 12 weeks FMLA, if the woman had a delivery with no complications. In other words, after the two - five day stay in the hospital, a woman cannot use any sick leave to stay home with her newborn unless she is physically incapacitated, in which case, she's using the sick leave to take care of herself, not her baby.

A. Federal workers in their child-bearing or adopting years earn less, on average, than other federal employees. They are at a moment in their careers when they can least afford to take any time off without pay, and least likely to have accumulated significant savings. It is not all unrealistic to imagine a federal worker starting out a low-graded job with a modest salary going into a downward financial spiral after the birth or adoption of a child and subsequent taking of unpaid leave.

Q. Why is a short-term disability (STDI) program inadequate for addressing these potential gaps?

A. The federal government does not provide its workforce with any disability insurance.

A. In 2008 the Bush Administration's proposal was to establish an "employees pay all" disability insurance program. This is the same as saying to federal employees: Go out and buy yourself some disability insurance. It is not a substitute for employer-provided paid parental leave.

A. The Bush Administration's STDI proposal discriminates against new fathers and adopted parents

A. The FMLA settled the question of whether anyone besides a woman who has just given birth deserves time off from work to care for a child. The Bush administration's STDI proposal is a huge step backwards for federal workers and families.

Q. The Bush Administration claimed that 86 percent of federal employees said they were very satisfied or satisfied with paid leave for illness and family care situations (childbirth, adoption, eldercare, etc.). If this is the case, why offer paid parental leave?

A. The Bush Administration's claim that 86 percent of federal employees are satisfied with current levels of paid leave for illness and family care was highly misleading.

A. Less than one-third of survey respondents of child bearing age (25-49 years) said they were "very satisfied" with current benefits.

A. The question asked in the survey does not address the question of paid parental leave or whether its provision by the government would encourage employees to remain in federal government employment.

A. The leave in this bill is not for illness or to care for a sick family member. It is to spend time with a new child.

A. All the major federal unions support this bill.

Q: Why did the Bush Administration oppose paid leave for federal workers?

A: The former Administration claimed that HR 5781 is costly, but the bill is pay-go neutral. "Enacting H.R. 5781 would not affect direct spending or receipts," according the Congressional Budget Office (CBO). The Congressional Budget Office says that it will cost \$190 million in 2010, the first full year the law will be in effect. The Joint Economic Committee estimates that this is equal to about less than one-tenth of one percent of the federal payroll.⁵

There are a number of important ways that providing paid parental leave will save the federal agencies money that are not included in CBO's cost estimate. The agencies will retain more employees, which will save turnover costs, and have another important employee benefit to aid them in recruitment of younger or highly qualified staff.

The largest financial gain will be in improved retention. The Joint Economic Committee estimates that it costs nearly three times as much to replace an employee than to provide them with four weeks of paid parental leave.

⁵ The numerator is the CBO cost estimate of \$190 million; the denominator is an estimate of total federal payroll of \$260 billion, which we received in phone correspondence with CBO.

Research shows that having access to leave can improve productivity and employee morale. These kinds of cost-savings are so important that Daniel Beard, Chief Administrative Officer of the U.S. House of Representatives noted, “I would even argue that this approach saves money. Employee morale is always greater when an employer treats employees with dignity, especially in times of crisis.” He also pointed out that “Salary budgets remain the same whether an employee takes leave or not. The pay for that employee has already been included in the budget. Whether that individual is on paid leave or not doesn't affect the employing authority's bottom line.”

A: The Bush Administration claimed that the current policy is adequate for family leave – employees can cobble together their sick and vacation time when they decide to have a family. It is surprising that the nation’s chief personnel manager does not see a distinction between being sick, taking a vacation, and becoming a new parent.

Q: Does the Obama Administration support paid leave for federal workers?

A: The Obama Administration is expected to fully support the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act. In 2008, then-Senator Obama was a co-sponsor of the bill (S. 3140). He stated, “We must do everything we can to ensure the best and the brightest Americans are recruited to serve in our federal agencies and programs, and that means providing them with quality work environments as well as competitive benefits packages. Our government should reflect our nation's values and aspirations, and we cannot ask federal employees to choose between caring for their children and serving their country. I believe strong families are the foundation for a strong community and nation, and that is why I am cosponsoring the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2008.”

Q: Do federal workers have enough paid leave available to them to draw on for parental leave?

A: Under the current system, federal workers cannot accrue enough leave to take the entire 12 weeks of FMLA as paid leave. Assuming a federal worker takes two weeks of vacation each year, it would take a federal worker about 10 years to accrue enough annual leave to receive 6 weeks of pay – the maximum accrual allowed – during their 12 weeks of FMLA. If a federal worker never took vacation time, it would still take someone over 2 years to save 6 weeks of paid leave.

Q: What evidence did the Bush Administration’s Office of Personnel Management (OPM) cite as evidence that the current leave policy is adequate?

A: The former Administration’s OPM stated that a 2006 employee survey⁶ indicates satisfaction with paid leave. This survey is flawed, because the question put to federal employees in the survey asks about paid leave for personal illness, child birth, adoption, and elder care. By doing

⁶ *Federal Human Capital Survey Results – 2006*. U.S. Office of Personnel Management.
<http://www.feddesk.com/freehandbooks/012607-1.pdf>

so, OPM lumps each of these distinct life events – requiring different personal and management decisions – into one broad category. Federal workers were not able to give a separate opinion on their satisfaction with their paid leave for illness versus family care situations. Moreover, young workers – those most likely to need parental leave – are underrepresented in the survey, further skewing the outcome.

Q: How do we know that federal workers need paid parental leave?

A: Labor unions representing federal workers have testified before Congress that this is an important benefit needed by their workers. Also, federal workers have passed along heartbreaking stories: from a woman who had to go back to work with an open wound due to a C-section, to a single mom who couldn't afford to take more than a few weeks of leave – and everything in between.

Congressional Budget Office Cost Estimates for the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act

At the time this document was prepared, CBO was still in the process of calculating the cost estimate for H.R. 626, the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2009. However, a CBO score was provided for H.R. 5781, the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2008. On June 18, 2008, the following information was prepared by the majority staff of the Joint Economic Committee:

Talking Points On the Congressional Budget Office Cost Estimates for H.R. 5781, The Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2008

HR 5781 is pay-go neutral: CBO states that “enacting HR 5781 would not affect direct spending or receipts.” In their score of the bill, CBO estimates the total value of the leaves taken in the first full year of implementation will total \$190 million.

The \$190 million is the amount that the agencies currently save on salaries when federal employees who have a new child take their unpaid leave, as they are entitled to under FMLA. The Joint Economic Committee estimates that this is equal to about less than one-tenth of one percent of the federal payroll.

To get the \$190 million figure, CBO tallies up the value of salaries for federal employees who will take advantage of paid parental leave:

- CBO assumes that every year, 17,700 female federal employees give birth or adopt and that each one will take the maximum amount of leave.
- CBO assumes that every year, 23,000 male federal employees have a new child and that they will use half of their available paid parental leave.
- The total value of the mother’s and father’s paychecks while they are on parental leave, given their average salaries, comes to \$120 million in the first full year of implementation. The CBO increases this value to \$190 million by assuming a 50 percent chance that OPM will increase allowable leave to eight week.

Federal agencies will have to sort out how to deal with paying this new benefit and whether they will ask for increased appropriations in the future. Currently, federal employees who have a child bear both the burden of going without pay during their FMLA leave as well as coping with their new family expenses. USDA estimates that a family will spend an additional \$11,000 dollars in the first year of having a new child, on top of any loss in salary during unpaid leave.

The CBO score does not take into account the cost savings of providing paid parental leave. This benefit can reduce turnover; it costs about 20 percent of an employee's salary to hire and train their replacement, far less than offering an-already trained employee a few weeks of paid leave.

Paid parental leave can also increase productivity. In testimony in support of this bill, Daniel Beard, Chief Administrative Officer of the U.S. House of Representatives concurred, "... this approach saves money. Employee morale is always greater when an employer treats employees with dignity, especially in times of crisis."

The Need for the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act (H.R. 626) – Personal Stories from Federal Workers

A Department of Energy employee had to return to work after she used up all of her saved annual and sick leave despite the fact that her C-Section wound had not healed and she was still on narcotic painkillers.

Here's what she wrote:

“After 36 hours of labor, my daughter was born via emergency c-section. I stayed in the hospital for 3 nights after the surgery (if I had stayed one more night, my medical problems likely would have been detected in the hospital, making the remainder of this story very different). The day after I was discharged, I noticed a lot of bleeding from my C-section wound. I went to my doctor's office, where they determined that the wound was infected, and they re-opened the entire wound to clean it out and drain it. The doctors then did not feel that they could safely re-stitch it, so the wound was left to heal from the inside out, with "wet to dry" dressing changes -- the wound was about 17 cm long and 5 cm deep, stuffed with gauze pads. I had a home nurse visit daily for about 2 months, after which point it was decided that my husband could take over care responsibilities for me. Healing was strangely slow, for reasons that no one could ever explain to me. So, there I was, with my leave dwindling away, wondering when this thing would heal, doped up on Percocet. I delayed my return to work several times, in hopes that I could heal and get off the drugs - but the hours ran out, and I simply couldn't go unpaid. As a result, when the leave I had saved up ran out after 3.5 months, I was forced to return to work with a quite long and deep open wound in my abdomen (and still on narcotic painkillers).”

A Walter Reed Army Medical Center nurse had to use a combination of leave without pay and leave donated by her colleagues to take off the necessary time to heal following her c-section. She would like to have more children, but is not sure how she and her husband could manage any future leave.

Here's what she wrote:

“My daughter was born 10 months ago, while I was working for Walter Reed Army Medical Center as a nurse. Because my baby was in a breech position, I had a planned c-section and needed to take 8-9 weeks off to recover from the surgery. Unfortunately, I only had just under 5 weeks of paid leave saved up. Luckily, for me a few of my coworkers had a lot of use or lose leave which they generously donated to me. But even with their generosity, I still needed to take a few days of leave without pay to take off the 9 weeks I had originally hoped to take following the birth. However, due to the difficulty in finding child care in this area because of the extensive day care wait lists, I actually had to take another week of leave which forced me into more leave without pay.

The larger problem is ahead of me. My husband and I would like to have several kids. I'm in my early thirties and I have worked for the government (DOD) for 11 years (4 of which were on active duty for the US Army). I currently have a balance of < 10 hours of sick leave due to my 10 month old needing to stay home from day care due to various illnesses acquired in day care. We would like to have another child within the next year or so. There will be no chance that I will have more than a week or 2 worth of leave for another maternity leave. Will my coworkers come through for me again? I can't depend on it. I don't know what we'll do.

It's so frustrating because I know that DOD is one of the largest employers in the U.S. with the largest budget of the government. However, they cannot find the justification or the appropriate money to offer any paid maternity leave. This is where I really get emotional so I will stop.”

In anticipation of the birth of their first child a couple who work at the Government Accountability Office saved both leave and money to help make expected time off easier for the family. However, unexpected home repairs used up their savings, forcing the new parents to take on credit card debt that they still haven't paid off, and requiring the mother to return to work earlier than planned. They would like to have a second child, but are not sure how they could afford it without paid leave.

Here is what the mother wrote:

“I had 5.5 years of federal employment when I had my daughter, who is now 17 months old. After a C-section, which required 8 weeks of sick leave, I was also forced to spend down my remaining annual leave before having to take Leave Without Pay for two pay periods. Because we could not afford to go any longer than that without my paycheck, I came back to work when my daughter was 4.5 months old. I have had to totally rebuild my sick and annual leave, and have made only a small impact there since coming back to work one year ago. Not to mention that we want to have a second child in the near future, and I will not have as much leave for the second child as I did for the first.”

Here is what the father added:

“We had expected my wife to have some leave without pay, and we had budgeted for it. Prior to the baby being born, we had no credit card debt. But a month into my wife's maternity leave, we had to replace the heat pump, which cost us about \$6,000. That completely wiped out our cash reserves. Since my wife was only paid for 45-55 hours per pay period, we were forced to live off credit cards during the remainder of her maternity leave and in the first few months after she went back to work. We have not yet cleared all of that debt. Having the 6 weeks of full pay sure would have come in handy at the time.”

As the sole breadwinner in her family, one Government Accountability Office employee could only afford to take six weeks of maternity leave, some of which was unpaid. She calls her short maternity leave the worst decision of her life.

Here's what she wrote:

Because my husband was in graduate school and I was the sole breadwinner who was new to GAO, I was only able to take six weeks total maternity leave (including my leave, donated leave and unpaid leave) when my daughter was born. It was the worst decision I've ever made, and it really wreaked havoc on my life, my husband and daughter's lives and my mother's life.

One federal employee used up much of her saved sick leave before the birth of her son, as a result of going into pre-term labor that forced her to stay on strict bed rest.

Here's what she wrote:

“When I was pregnant with my son, I carefully saved up my sick and annual leave, calculating how much I would have when he was born. Unexpectedly, I went into pre-term labor a month before he was due. I was in the hospital for 3 days (and then in and out 4 more times before he was actually born) and on strict bed-rest 24/7. This meant that I used up a lot of my sick leave before my son was even born! Although I came back full-time at the time I had originally planned (when he was 3 1/2 months old), I also ended up having to work from home part-time when he was only 2 months old because I felt I needed to do this to try get as many paid hours as I could. That meant that I spent less time with my son (bonding with him, caring for him, getting used to being a new mother) than I would have liked.”

One federal employee was only able to save 4.5 weeks of leave before the birth of her son. As a result, she had to rely on donated leave and leave without pay for her maternity leave. She also used advanced sick leave to stay home, but this has left her with a sick leave deficit that has made being a working mother particularly difficult.

Here is what she wrote:

“I took a total of 18 weeks off for maternity leave. I had only been with the federal government for about 2 years before I went on maternity leave so I didn't have a lot of paid leave accrued -- plus, I only earn 4 hours per pay period.

I used up all my paid sick and annual leave within 4.5 weeks (and I had been hoarding it from the moment I found out I was pregnant). I was eligible to get a leave donation from my husband

(also a government employee), but you can only receive donations up to six weeks post partum so I got about 60 hours (1.5 weeks) from him .

From 6 weeks to 18 weeks, I used a combination of LWOP and advanced sick leave. Advanced leave helped take the financial bite out of LWOP and without the advanced sick leave I would have had to 1) return to work earlier, or 2) use up a lot of savings to stay home.

However, when I returned to work full time, not only did I have no annual leave, but I have a sick leave deficit which will take a long time to dig myself out of. That means if I need to take time off work for doctors appointments or illness I have to use annual leave (still earning only 4 hours per pay period), or I have to work late or on weekends to make up the hours I've missed.”
