

## **Paid Parental Leave for King County Employees: It's Time!**

How can a new parent be expected to take the time he or she needs to care for a new child, while sacrificing wages which help to keep that newborn fed and clothed? It doesn't make any sense, and it's time our workplace policies reflected our shared family values.

---

### ***King County policies should reflect the modern American workforce:***

- Women comprise about 47 percent of the workforce in the US and two-thirds of the low-wage workforce. Further, almost two-thirds of women with children under 6 work, about twice the rate of the previous generation.
- The United States is the only advanced industrialized country without a national law providing new parents with at least some paid family leave.
- We need a policy that accounts for the fact that women now give birth and earn wages on which their families depend—and, for that matter, that men now earn wages and provide childcare on which their families depend.

### ***What we offer now isn't enough:***

- The Family and Medical Leave Act, the only federal leave protection available to new parents in this country, does not require that an employer pay new moms and dads for a single day of leave; it merely protects their jobs for twelve weeks of unpaid leave *only if* they have worked at the company for at least a year, and that company employs at least 50 people.
- This effectively means that at least 40 percent of American workers (according to the Council of Economic Advisors) are excluded from even this small privilege.

### ***Forcing new parents, particularly mothers, back to work early has negative consequences for children:***

- When new moms can take maternity leave, their children are more likely to be breast-fed and taken to the doctor for checkups. Paid parental leave also correlates with lower infant mortality rates.
- It also results in strengthened parental bonding, providing long-term benefits that improve a child's brain development, social development and overall well-being.

### ***Paid parental leave is particularly good for women:***

- New mothers experience improved mental and physical health as a result of taking leave.
- Pregnancy and the time immediately post-partum play a serious role in slowing professional momentum for women. Paid leave raises the probability that mothers return to employment later, and then work more hours and earn higher wages.
- More women than ever are having babies at the peak of their careers, and they should not be punished for it.



***Paid parental leave reduces disparities in leave-taking between low and high income employees:***

- With paid leave, more people take time off after a birth, adoption or placement of a foster child - particularly low-income parents, who may have taken no leave or dropped out of the workforce altogether.

***Paid parental leave shouldn't be a privilege reserved for only some of us:***

- Right now, the ability to adjust to parenthood, learn to breast-feed, and manage a newborn is a luxury only certain people can afford.
- Our outdated workforce policies reinforce the antiquated notion that women belong at home and not in the workforce. They also ultimately affirm professional life as being built for men, and discourage new fathers from taking the time they need to bond with their children.
- As President Obama has said, "It's time we stop treating child care as a side issue or a women's issue, and treat it like the national economic priority that it is."

***What is it costing us NOT to do this?:***

- Losing employees after the birth of a child (or not being able to recruit top candidates in the first place) is expensive for the County due to the costs of re-hiring and training new employees.
- Health outcomes are worse for both parents and children when employees don't have paid parental leave. As a self-insured employer, King County is on the hook for the increased medical costs associated with those outcomes. And we are all better off when kids have a strong start in life.
- Ultimately it's new parents trying to juggle the demands of childcare while worrying about their jobs and their paychecks who can't afford NOT to have paid parental leave.

***Should all employers in King County be required to provide paid parental leave?:***

- The good news is that some of the largest employers in King County already do.
- We took the Women's Advisory Board recommendations to heart, and see this as an opportunity for King County to set an example and take the lead as a model employer.
- We trust other employers in the county to do right by their employees. The conditions in which people live, work and play are determinants of equity. What better way to provide our children with an equitable, fair start in life than by allowing their parents to be with them in their first days?