

Paid Family Medical Leave: Health & Employment Outcomes

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I. Executive Summary

Demographic and cultural shifts have prompted growing interest in paid family medical leave to help employees manage work and family obligations. The vast majority of the U.S. population (70+%) supports paid family medical leave, and thirteen U.S. states have enacted paid family medical leave legislation with various provisions. Still, vocal opponents who represent businesses have expressed concern about the possible harms that may follow if employers are required to provide paid family medical leave.

This report reviews the existing scholarly literature to evaluate the known impact of paid family medical leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, and paid health-related leave on business and health outcomes, with extra attention paid to peer-reviewed studies in the U.S. Overall, there is more evidence that these leave programs:

- Decrease poverty and reliance on social welfare
- Increase labor force attachment of U.S. workers
- Have a positive or neutral influence on U.S. employees' future earnings
- Have a positive or neutral effect on U.S. business profitability
- Do not affect U.S. business productivity
- Do not increase U.S. companies' administrative burden
- Have a positive or neutral effect on employee morale
- Reduce employee turnover in U.S. companies
- Reduce U.S. employer wage costs ("lower per worker wage bill")
- Improve or have no effect on the U.S. labor market
- Reduce infant death by up to 20%
- Reduce premature birth by nearly 7%
- Double the duration of breastfeeding
- Increase on-time childhood vaccinations
- Decrease rehospitalization of newborns by 47%
- Reduce postpartum depression when leaves are up to 6 months in duration
- Decrease mothers' need for antibiotics by 11% and antidepressants by 26%
- Improve mothers' postpartum health, including BMI and blood pressure at age 40
- Result in a 51% reduction in rehospitalization of mothers for 21 months after childbirth
- Reduce death from all causes by 16% among fathers who take paternity leave
- Reduce the spread of contagious illness

State-level paid family medical leave policies provide an infrastructure that makes offering paid leave benefits more accessible, thus allowing small and medium-sized businesses to compete with larger firms in terms of leave benefits. Empirical research finds that 70% of businesses support paid family leave, with small firms overwhelmingly supporting it. Employers surveyed were not aware of any abuse of benefits by their employees. Support for paid family leave grew among firms with experience using it.

II. Introduction

Paid family leave is a policy of particular interest to contemporary workers and their families. Conversations around paid family leave are properly framed around current social realities such as the prevalence of single-parent households, increased participation of women and mothers with dependent children in the workforce, unacceptably high maternal and infant mortality rates, and the aging of baby boomers.

Paid family medical leave provides pay during a medical leave of absence, allowing families to stay financially afloat when a single parent has a serious medical issue such as cancer and needs time off work to recover. Since the Family Medical Leave Act does not cover 44% of US workers, paid family medical leave also provides job protection to working parents when a child is diagnosed with a serious medical issue and needs to be hospitalized, allowing the parents not to have to choose between leaving their child alone in the hospital to face medical tests and procedures, or going to work so they can continue to afford medical bills, food, and housing for their family. Paid family medical leave also allows a pregnant woman who is prescribed bed rest due to medical complications the means to take time off work without losing wages. Additionally, paid family medical leave extends older adults' ability to live independently by allowing a family caregiver to help manage the rehabilitation visits necessary for an elderly family member with a broken hip to return to functioning. These kinds of serious life events impact millions of Americans, particularly women, who provide unpaid care, often at the expense of their own health, employment, and financial stability. These situations highlight the need for paid family medical leave to help employees manage personal health and caregiving responsibilities without losing their job or economic security.

Labor force participation is a marker of economic well-being in a region. Paid family medical leave promotes labor force involvement, particularly among women and older adults. In Michigan, women's labor force involvement is lower compared to men's. This disparity is also seen nationally, where mothers with young children are less likely to participate in the workforce than fathers due to childcare responsibilities. Families led by single parents may be particularly squeezed when family needs increase. Both male and female workers are more likely to resign from a job that lacks paid leave, and mothers and caregivers for older adults may leave the workforce altogether without access to this important benefit. Addressing these obstacles and increasing women's labor force participation to levels seen in other countries could significantly boost economic activity.

This report reviews the benefits of paid family medical leave, focusing on work and health-related outcomes reported in peer-reviewed U.S. studies. The economic advantages of paid leave are compelling. Paid leave is associated with a decrease in poverty, reduced reliance on social welfare, and increased labor force attachment. Paid leave has a positive or neutral impact on employees' future earnings and business profitability. The evidence suggests that paid family leave does not negatively affect business productivity or increase administrative burdens. In fact, paid leave can improve employee morale, reduce turnover, and lower wage costs for employers. Wage costs can be reduced in state-run paid family leave programs since when employees are on leave, the insurance program funds their wages, not the employer. The scholarly literature reveals that businesses surveyed are unaware of any instances of their employees abusing benefits. Most businesses (70+%) have a favorable view of paid family leave mandates. This is not surprising as state-run paid family medical leave programs can provide a competitive advantage to small and medium-sized businesses by providing infrastructure that

makes offering paid family leave benefits more feasible and affordable, thus allowing small and medium-sized companies to compete with larger firms regarding leave benefits.

Health-related findings contained in this report point to the benefits of paid family leave. Indeed, paid family leave is associated with significant health improvements for infants, mothers, and fathers. Paid parental leaves reduce infant mortality by up to 20%, decrease premature births by nearly 7%, and double the duration of breastfeeding. These health benefits extend to an increase in on-time childhood vaccinations and a 47% reduction in the rehospitalization of newborns. Additionally, paid parental leave has been shown to reduce postpartum depression, decrease the need for antibiotics and antidepressants among mothers, and improve maternal long-term health, including body mass index and blood pressure.

This report will help the reader better understand what can be expected if Michigan adopts paid family medical leave. The findings section will provide business and health outcomes related to paid leave found in published studies. The background section will provide details about demographic and cultural shifts driving the need for these policies and will also provide an overview of the existing policy landscape in Michigan and nationally.

III. Research Findings

A. Employment-Related Outcomes:

This section reviews the scholarly literature regarding key business and employment-related outcomes. It is important to note that various federal and state policies have unique characteristics, such as wage replacement, job protection, duration, eligibility, and allowable uses for leave. Outcomes should be considered in light of these variations in policy.

The most common reason employees use paid family medical leave is to tend to their own medical problems, yet most studies focus on parental (maternity/paternity) or caregiving leave. To remedy this gap, the paid sick leave literature is included as a proxy for paid medical leave. Paid sick leave is an imperfect proxy since the duration of paid sick leave is often shorter than the duration of paid medical leave; however, including paid sick leave provides essential information regarding the personal and public health outcomes as well as the business outcomes when workers are able to successfully manage employment and their health.

Besides each outcome of interest, the name of each study's first author, the locality studied, and the policy or policies studied are listed. Each study's outcome of interest is categorized as favorable (+) or unfavorable (-). For example, a favorable outcome is an increase in labor force attachment, and an unfavorable outcome is an increase in employer wage costs. Studies that showed no link between the variables of interest are categorized as "no impact." Outcomes are classified according to statistical significance or according to categories with the highest rankings when that information is unavailable. If a category (favorable +, unfavorable -, or no impact) is not listed, no studies were identified corresponding to that category. For example, no unfavorable studies were found regarding the effects of paid leave on business productivity or profitability.

Overall, while studies on labor force attachment are mixed, the majority suggest that paid family leave strengthens labor force attachment, particularly in the U.S. Additionally, paid family leave generally has a positive or neutral impact on employees' future earnings and business profitability; likewise, paid leave has a positive or neutral impact on employee morale. Paid family leave does not impact business productivity. The studies reviewed find no evidence

of increased administrative burden or abuse of benefits. Paid leave is also associated with reduced employee turnover and lower employer wage costs. The labor market either improves or remains unaffected by paid leave policies. Most businesses support paid family leave, and the proportion of businesses who support paid family leave increases as businesses use this policy. These findings suggest that paid leave policies can be implemented while supporting business interests.

▪ **NOTES:**

- OECD refers to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
- FMLA refers to the Family Medical Leave Act
- U.S. refers to the United States
- CA PFL refers to California Paid Family Leave
- TDI refers to Temporary Disability Insurance
- PSL refers to paid sick leave
- FFCRA refers to the Family First Coronavirus Response Act
- PTO refers to paid time off
- PSL refers to paid sick leave

A1. Labor force attachment

Key takeaway regarding labor force attachment: Most studies suggest paid family medical leave increases labor force attachment.

These findings highlight that paid family leave in the U.S. can promote labor force attachment.

+ *Increased labor force attachment*

Numerous studies (4 from the U.S.) indicate that paid family leave strengthens labor force attachment.

Following Paid Family Leave implementation in California:

- Mothers were more likely to be employed when their child was nine months, 12 months, and two years of age.
- Mothers worked more hours each week when their children were 1-3 years of age.
- Parents with higher incomes were more likely to return to work compared to lower-income employees.
- Larger benefits received while on leave were related to increased future labor force attachment.
- Employees who took a caregiving leave were more prone to reenter the workforce compared to employees who took a parental leave.
- Paid family leave improved young women's labor participation overall.
 - Baker¹ (Canada, maternity leave expansion including job protection)
 - Kluge² (Germany, parental leave)
 - Olivetti³ (High-income countries, parental leave + other family policies)
 - Bergemann⁴ (Germany, paid parental leave)
 - Winegarden⁵ (OECD, maternal leave)
 - Baum⁶ (U.S., maternity leave)
 - Baum & Ruhm⁷ (U.S. CA PFL for parental leave)
 - Rossin-Slater et al.⁸ 2013 (U.S. CA PFL for maternity leave)
 - Stearns⁹ 2018 (Britain, maternity leave with job protection)
 - Das¹⁰ (U.S., CA PFL for caregiving or parental leave)

- Decreased female labor force participation

One US study indicated that paid family leave prolonged the duration of unemployment among young women by two weeks. Two international studies found that lengthy (50-week) paid maternity leaves decreased employers' desire to hire women and increased the time women spent out of the workforce while on leave.

- Ahmed¹¹ (Asia & Africa, maternity leave)
- Baker 2010¹ (Canada, maternity leave expansion including job protection)
- Das¹⁰ (U.S., CA PFL for caregiving or parental leave)

No impact on labor force participation

Two international studies find parental leave does not impact labor force participation.

- Dahl¹² (Norway, paid maternity leave extension)
- Olivetti³ (Multiple countries, parental leave)

A2. Earnings

Key takeaway regarding earnings: U.S. studies have found that paid family leave has a favorable or neutral impact on employee's future earnings.

These findings suggest that paid leave policies can be implemented in the U.S. without negatively affecting an employee's future earnings.

+ Increased earnings

- Workers who receive a larger benefit dollar amount while on leave were more likely to have an increase in future earnings.
- Mothers with paid family leave had higher wages when their children were 1-3 years of age.
 - Bedard¹³ (U.S., CA PFL for parental leave or caregiving)
 - Rossin-Slater et al.⁸2013 (U.S., CA PFL for maternity leave)

- Decreased earnings

Three international studies found that expanding existing paid parental leave to up to 3 years decreased women's wages after they returned to work. These studies focus on expanding already generous paid parental leave. They do not compare those with and without access to paid family leave benefits.

- Schönberg¹⁴ (Germany, paid maternity leave expansion)
- Lequien¹⁵ (France, expansion of paid parental leave)
- Lalive¹⁶ (Austria, expansion of paid parental leave)

No impact on earnings

Three studies found that paid leave does not impact earnings.

- Lalive¹⁶ (Austria, expansion of paid parental leave)
- Baum & Ruhm⁷ (US, CA PFL)
- Olivetti³ (Multiple countries, parental leave)

A3. Business profitability

Key takeaway regarding business profitability: Paid leave has a positive or neutral influence on business profitability. There are no studies identified that find paid family leave harms business profitability.

These findings suggest that paid leave policies can be implemented without negatively affecting a company's profitability.

+ Increased profitability

One U.S. study found that offering employees paid sick leave increases the odds that a firm will survive.

- Messersmith¹⁷ (U.S., PSL)

No impact on profitability

Three U.S. studies indicate leave policies do not impact profitability. 78% of firms with at least one worker who utilized state-paid family leave said the policy did not affect their business profitability.

- Lerner¹⁸ (New Jersey, paid family leave)
- US DOL (U.S., FMLA)¹⁹
- Baughman²⁰ (U.S., PSL)

A4. Business Productivity

Key takeaway regarding business productivity: U.S. studies reveal that paid family leave does not impact business productivity. There are no studies identified that find paid family leave harms business productivity.

These findings suggest that paid leave policies can be implemented without negatively affecting business productivity.

No impact on productivity

83% of employers surveyed indicated that paid family leave did not impact business productivity.

- Lerner¹⁸ (New Jersey, paid family leave)
- Bartel²¹ 2016 (US--RI, CT, MA, caregiving + parental leave)
- US DOL (U.S., FMLA)²²

A5. Employee morale

Key takeaway regarding employee morale: Paid leave has a positive or neutral impact on morale. No studies were identified that find paid family leave harms morale.

These findings imply that paid leave policies can be implemented without negatively affecting employee morale.

+ Increased morale

Paid time off to manage health improves employee morale.

- Kovner²³ (US, PTO)
- Sainju²⁴ (US, PSL)

No impact on morale

89% of employers with at least one employee using state-mandated paid family leave indicated the policy had either a neutral or positive influence on employee morale. No increased resentment among co-workers.

- Lerner¹⁸ (New Jersey, paid family leave)
- Bartel et al.²¹ 2016 (US--RI, CT, MA, caregiving + parental leave)

A6. Administrative burden

Key takeaway regarding administrative burden: U.S. studies find paid family leave does not impact administrative burden. There are no studies identified that found paid family leave increases administrative burden.

These findings suggest that paid leave policies can be implemented without increasing employers' administrative burden.

No impact on administrative burden

Paid family leave does not increase the employer's administrative burden. Ninety percent of employers report no adverse effects from complying with family leave legislation requirements. Most employers who had an employee use the state-mandated paid family leave benefit program experienced no effect on their paperwork load.

- Lerner¹⁸ (New Jersey, paid family leave)
- US DOL (U.S., FMLA)²²

A7. Abuse of benefits

Key takeaway regarding abuse of benefits: No studies were found that show any evidence of abuse of benefits. Firms polled indicated no awareness of their employees misusing the paid leave program.

These findings suggest that paid leave policies can be implemented without concern about substantial abuse of benefits.

No impact on abuse of benefits

In a study of firms' experiences, no firms indicated awareness of any of their personnel who misused the paid leave program.

- Lerner¹⁸ (New Jersey, paid family leave)

A8. Turnover

Key takeaway regarding turnover: The majority of U.S. studies find paid leave reduces employee turnover.

These findings highlight the overall positive impact of paid leave on reducing employee turnover.

+ Decreased turnover

Female workers permitted to take maternity leave were more likely to return to their previous jobs following the birth of their children. Turnover declined after paid family leave was enacted in California.

- Bedard¹³ (C.A., PFL)
- Hill²⁵ (US PSL)
- Houseworth²⁶ (U.S., PTO)
- Veenstra²⁷ 2015 (US, PSL)
- Veenstra²⁸ 2018 (U.S., extended PSL)
- Wiener²⁹ (U.S., PTO)
- Baum⁶ (U.S., FMLA)

- VanderWeerd³⁰ (U.S., PTO, PSL)
- Baum⁶ (U.S., maternity leave)

- Increased turnover

A study of cancer patients and a study of nurses found higher turnover among workers with paid leave.

- Luo³¹ (U.S., PTO)
- Poirier³² (U.S., PSL)

No impact on turnover

94% of employers with at least one employee use the state family leave policy indicated the policy did not affect employee turnover.

- Bartel et al.²¹ 2016 (US-RI, CT, MA, caregiving + parental leave)
- Baughman²⁰ (U.S., PSL)
- Houseworth²⁶ 2020 (U.S., PTO)
- Pettingell³³ (U.S., any PTO)
- Luo³¹ (U.S., PSL/PTO)
- Wiener²⁹ (U.S., PTO)

A9. Employer wage costs

Key takeaway regarding wage costs: Paid family leave can reduce U.S. employer wage costs.

These findings suggest that paid leave policies can be implemented without higher wage costs.

+ Decreased wage costs

As employees took more leave, wage costs did not increase in California over the 14 years studied. Indeed, California had a “lower per worker wage bill” after paid family leave was enacted.

- Bedard¹³ (CA PFL)

A10. Labor market

Key takeaway regarding the labor market: U.S. studies find paid leave improves or has no impact on the labor market.

These findings suggest that paid leave policies can be implemented without harm to the labor market.

+ Improves labor market

States with paid leave mandates had higher labor market participation.

- Brewer³⁴ (U.S., PTO)
- Shinall³⁵ (U.S., PSL)
- Li³⁶ (US, PSL mandate)

No impact on labor market

- Pichler³⁷ 2020 (US, FFCRA)
- Miller³⁸ (US, PSL mandate)

A11. General employer view of paid family leave

Key takeaway regarding employer view of paid family leave: 70+% of firms support state-mandated paid family leave. Support for paid family leave grew among firms that had experience using it. Small firms overwhelmingly support paid family leave.

+ *Positive View*

- One year after it took effect, most small (10-19 employees), medium (20-49 employees), and large (50-99 employees) businesses support the state-mandated paid family leave program.
- Firm opposition to paid family leave was low (less than 20%) and was reduced by another ten percentage points among businesses that gained experience using paid family leave. Only 10% of companies with experience using paid family leave were opposed one year after policy implementation.
 - Bartel et al.²¹ 2016 (US--RI, CT, MA, caregiving + parental leave)
 - Bartel et al.³⁹ 2021 (US-NJ, NY, PFL)

B. Health and Well-being Outcomes:

Numerous international and U.S.-based studies find leaves connected with childbirth, including paid parental leave, maternity leave, and paternity leave, are linked to favorable health outcomes for parents and children. Paid parental leaves reduce infant and child mortality, lower the incidence of low birth weight and premature births, and increase the duration of breastfeeding. Paid family leaves also improve child health, increase on-time immunizations, and reduce infant rehospitalization. For mothers, paid leave enhances mental health, reduces postpartum depression, and improves overall health indicators such as BMI and blood pressure. Fathers benefit from reduced mortality and increased involvement with their children. Paid family leave improves public health by reducing disease transmission and improving workplace safety. These findings indicate that paid family medical leave supports important personal and public health outcomes.

B1. Favorable health outcomes for children:

Key takeaways: parental leave reduces infant and child death

Increasing the number of paid, job-protected weeks of paid parental leave significantly decreases infant mortality. Decades of data show extending paid parental leave by ten weeks equates to a 3.3% to 6% reduction in infant and child mortality, and there is up to a 20% reduction in infant mortality with longer paid leave programs. A one-week extension of paid paternity leave lowers deaths of infants and children under age 5.

- Ruhm⁴⁰ (Europe, parental leave)
- Tanaka⁴¹ (OECD, parental leave)
- Shim⁴² (OECD, family leave)
- Heyman⁴³ (OECD, paid maternity leave)
- Khan⁴⁴ (OECD, paid family leave expansion)
- Winegarden⁴⁵ (OECD, maternal leave)
- Patton⁴⁶ (OECD, paid parental leave)
- Rossin⁴⁷ (U.S., unpaid FMLA maternity leave)
- Montoya-Williams⁴⁸ (US, CA PFL)
- Chen⁴⁹ (U.S., CA PFL)
- Ahmed¹¹ (Asia & Africa, maternity leave)

Key takeaway: parental leave reduces low birth weight babies

Paid maternity leave in the U.S. reduces the incidence of low-birth-weight babies by 10%.

- Ruhm⁵⁰ (Europe, parental leave)
- Tanaka⁴¹ (OECD, parental leave)
- Rossin⁴⁷ (U.S., unpaid FMLA maternity leave)
- Stearns⁵¹ 2015 (U.S., TDI paid maternity leave)

Key takeaway: leave-taking reduces premature births

Paid maternity leave in the U.S. reduced preterm births by nearly 7%.

- Rossin⁴⁷ (U.S., unpaid FMLA maternity leave)
- Stearns 2015 (U.S., TDI)

Key takeaway: paid family leave increases the rate and duration of breastfeeding

California's Paid Family Leave Program resulted in a 100% increase in the length of time babies are breastfed. At least three months of leave is related to women breastfeeding their infants for longer.

- Baker⁵² (Canada, maternity leave)
- Huang⁵³ (U.S., CA PFL)
- Applebaum⁵⁴ (US, CA PFL)
- Hamad⁵⁵ (U.S., CA & N.J., paid family leave)
- Pac⁵⁶ (U.S., CA PFL)
- Rosenberg⁵⁷ (U.S., States with PFML)
- Kortsmit⁵⁸ (U.S., paid and unpaid maternity leave)
- Guendelman⁵⁹ (U.S., paid maternity leave)
- Stack⁶⁰ (U.S., maternity leave)
- Perry⁶¹ (US-43 States and D.C., PFML)
- Mirkovic⁶² (U.S., paid maternity leave)

Key takeaway: paid family leave increases on-time immunizations

On-time child vaccinations increased among California parents with paid family leave.

- Daku⁶³ (18 U.N. countries, maternity leave)
- Choudhury⁶⁴ (CA, PFL)

Key takeaway: paid family leave decreases infant rehospitalization

U.S. mothers with paid maternity leave had a 47% reduction in the likelihood their newborn would be rehospitalized.

- Jou⁶⁵ (U.S., paid maternity leave vs. unpaid or no leave)
- Pihl⁶⁶ (C.A., PFL)

Key takeaway: paid family leave improves child health

California's paid family leave program improves overall child health.

- Bullinger⁶⁷ (CA, PFL)

Key takeaway: paid maternity leave improves sibling health

In an international study, increasing the duration of paid maternity leave improved sibling health.

- Beuchert⁶⁸ (Denmark, paid maternity leave expansion)

Key takeaway: maternity leave improves mother-child bonding

In a U.S. study, longer maternity leave duration improved the mother-child connection.

- Plotka⁶⁹ (U.S., maternity leave)

B2. Other favorable outcomes for children:

Key takeaway: parental leave improves child cognitive functioning

An international study found parental leave improved children's later school performance.

- Cools⁷⁰ (Norway, paternity leave)

Key takeaway: paid maternity leave improves child educational attainment

An international study found children born to mothers who had four months of paid maternity leave were 2% less apt to drop out of high school.

- Carneiro⁷¹ (Norway, 4 months paid and one year unpaid maternity leave)

Key takeaway: paid maternity leave improves future earnings of children

An international study found the children of mothers who took an extended maternity leave had a 5% wage increase at age 30.

- Carneiro⁷¹ (Norway, 4 months paid and one year unpaid maternity leave)

B3. Favorable health outcomes for mothers:

Key takeaway: paid family leave improves maternal general mental health

Twelve weeks of maternity leave provides the maximum benefit for increasing maternal mental health.

- Heshmati⁷² (World-wide systematic review, parental leave)
- Perry⁶¹ (U.S. 43 States and D.C., PFML)
- Bullinger⁶⁷ (CA, PFL)
- Whitney⁷³ (World-wide systematic review, maternity leave)

Key takeaway: paid maternity leave of up to six months reduces maternal depression

Each added day off up to 6 months reduces postpartum depression, while leaves longer than six months increase maternal depression.

- Avendano⁷⁴ (Europe, maternity leave)
- Bütikofer⁷⁵ (Norway, paid maternity leave)
- Kornfeind⁷⁶ (U.S., paid maternity leave)
- Dagher⁷⁷ (U.S., maternity leave)
- Stack⁷⁸ (U.S., maternity leave)

Key takeaway: paid family leave improves maternal health

Twelve weeks of maternity leave provides maximum benefit for maternal health.

- Heshmati⁷² (World-wide systematic review, parental leave)
- Perry⁶¹ (U.S. 43 States and D.C., PFML)
- Bullinger⁶⁷ (CA, PFL)
- Whitney⁷³ (World-wide systematic review, maternity leave)

- Hewitt ⁷⁹ (Australia, paid maternity leave)

Key takeaway: paternal leave reduces maternal need for antibiotics and antidepressants

Paternal leave-taking decreases mothers' need for antibiotics by 11% and antidepressants by 26%.

- Persson ⁸⁰ (Sweden, paternity leave)

Key takeaway: paid maternity leave improves maternal BMI, blood pressure, and exercise when the mother is 40 years of age

Expanding the duration of paid maternity leave improves several indicators of mothers' health at age 40.

- Bütikofer ⁷⁵ (Norway, paid maternity leave)
- Beuchert ⁶⁸ (Denmark, paid maternity leave expansion)

Key takeaway: paid maternity leave reduces maternal hospitalization

Mothers with paid maternity leave in the U.S. had a 51% reduction in hospitalizations for 21 months after childbirth.

- Beuchert ⁶⁸ (Denmark, paid maternity leave expansion)
- Jou ⁶⁵ (U.S. paid maternity leave vs unpaid or no leave)

Key takeaway: maternity leave improves maternal health while working

U.S. women who took a more extended maternity leave had better health during the first 30 days when they returned to work.

- Falletta ⁸¹ (U.S., maternity leave)

B4. Favorable outcomes for fathers:

Key takeaway: paternity leave reduces paternal death

Fathers who take paternity leave had a 16% reduction in death from all causes.

- Månsdotter ⁸² (Sweden, paternity leave)

Key takeaway: paternity leave improves father involvement

U.S. fathers who took more weeks of parental leave exhibited increased engagement with their children at five years of age.

- Haas ⁸³ (Sweden, parental leave)
- Huerta ⁸⁴ (OECD countries, paternity leave)
- Nepomnyaschy ⁸⁵ (paternity leave)
- Pragg ⁸⁶ (U.S., parental leave)
- Petts ⁸⁷ (U.S., paternity leave)

B5. Additional personal and public health benefits

Key takeaway: paid family leave reduces disease transmission

Paid family medical leave in the U.S. significantly decreased the spread of COVID-19 (by 400 cases daily) in the most critical stage of the pandemic.

- Pichler⁸⁸ (US, FFCRA)

Additional positive outcomes are revealed when paid sick leave is used as a proxy for paid medical leave.

Personal and familial health benefits

Key takeaway: paid sick leave improves sleep, work safety, and receipt of needed care

U.S. workers with paid time off work to manage their health are:

- More likely to be absent from work when sick or injured⁸⁹
- Less likely to postpone or do without needed medical care for family⁸⁹
- More likely to receive six preventive medical screenings⁹⁰ (for blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, flu, cervical cancer)
- Have higher sleep quality⁹¹
- Less likely to experience psychological distress⁹²
- Have lower rates of death from all causes⁹³
- Less likely to spread contagious illnesses⁹⁴
- More likely to be healthy, safe, and uninjured while at work⁹⁵

Familial economic benefits

Key takeaway: workers with paid leave experience less poverty, worry, and financial strain

U.S. workers with paid time off work to manage their health are:

- Less likely to be in poverty⁹⁶
- More likely to afford dental care, eyeglasses, and prescription medication⁹⁶
- Have lower medical costs⁹⁶
- Have less financial worry⁹⁷
- Have higher retirement savings (male workers)⁹⁸

Benefits to the social welfare system

Key takeaway: paid leave reduces the use of welfare assistance

U.S. workers with paid time off work to manage their health are:

- Less likely to receive sponsored rental assistance⁹⁹
- Less likely to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program⁹⁹
- Less likely to receive financial assistance from a public welfare initiative⁹⁹
- Less likely to receive alternative forms of welfare aid⁹⁹ (transportation and childcare support)

III. Background on Paid Family Medical Leave and Its Growing Importance in The Workplace

A. Demographic and Cultural Shifts

Demographic and social shifts in the U.S. have resulted in notable changes to work and family. These shifts have led to a growing interest in Paid Family Medical Leave as a policy solution to allow employees to balance work demands and their families' health and livelihood.

In the US, there is a rise in single-parent households¹⁰⁰. Single parents often face the dual challenge of providing for their families while also being the primary caregiver. Paid family leave can allow single parents to tend to their newborns without the added stress of losing income.

Contemporary US society also sees increased participation of women and mothers with dependent children in the workforce¹⁰¹. With more women working, families increasingly rely on dual incomes. Paid family leave ensures that these families can maintain financial stability while allowing parents to take the time needed for childbirth and early childcare.

Additionally, over the last 35 years, the US has seen a significant change. Now, one-third of births occur by Cesarean delivery¹⁰², which requires longer recovery periods than natural births. Paid family leave provides mothers the necessary time to recover from surgery and bond with their newborns, which is essential for maternal and infant health.

The health and safety of mothers and children are compromised by the current system, where mothers without paid leave or the means to take unpaid leave are obliged to return to work immediately following birth. This situation is not without consequences. Indeed, US infant and maternal mortality rates are three times higher¹⁰³ than other high-income countries, underscoring the need for better perinatal and postpartum care. Paid family leave can contribute to lowering these rates by allowing parents to focus on their health and their baby's health without the pressure of returning to work too soon.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the need for personal health and caregiving leave. Due to the pandemic, many individuals have faced increased health challenges and caregiving responsibilities¹⁰⁴. This has brought to light the importance of having flexible workplace policies that allow employees to manage personal and family health without the fear of losing their jobs or income. Paid Family Medical Leave is a critical component in addressing these needs.

Moreover, there is a rising demand for caregiving of aging parents and family members¹⁰⁵ as all baby boomers reach age 65 by 2030¹⁰⁶. This demographic shift means that more employees will require time away to care for their elderly relatives. Flexible workplace policies, such as Paid Family Medical Leave, are essential to support these caregiving responsibilities. Put together, these factors collectively underscore the necessity for policies to accommodate the evolving needs of modern families.

B. Labor Force Participation, Obstacles, and Rewards

Labor force participation is an indicator of economic prosperity. Correspondingly, increasing labor participation among adults is an important goal for increasing a region's economic prosperity. In Michigan, women's labor force participation is 10% lower than men's¹⁰⁷, at 57.3% versus 67.2%. This is consistent with national trends where mothers with children under five years of age are 20% less likely to be in the labor force¹⁰⁷ compared to fathers, partly due to increased childcare by women. This situation is complicated by the fact that nearly 80% of single parents in Michigan are female¹⁰⁷.

In addition to childcare, 48 million Americans provide care to an adult.¹⁰⁸ Over half of adult family caregivers are over the age of fifty,¹⁰⁹ while most commonly care is for an adult over the age of 65¹⁰⁹. Sixty-one percent of caregivers work, and 32% of these workers have taken a leave of absence, reduced their work hours (27%), or exited the workforce altogether (16%) to manage their caregiving responsibilities¹⁰⁸. Women shoulder most of all types of unpaid family

caregiving of relatives, which negatively impacts their health, ability to work, and financial well-being.^{110,111}

Michigan women are more likely to have multiple jobs or work part-time, earn \$0.81 for every \$1 earned by men, and experience greater poverty despite higher educational attainment¹⁰⁷. Significant disparities in earnings also exist by race and ethnicity¹¹² as Black (\$.79), Hispanic (\$.77), and multiracial (\$.69) workers earn less than white workers. It is projected that increasing women's labor participation to rates seen in Canada or Germany would increase economic activity by \$750 billion annually¹¹³.

This situation underscores the value of paid family leave as it presents a win-win scenario for families, businesses, and the economy at large. When workers can manage their personal, reproductive, family, and healthcare needs while maintaining employment, it benefits everyone involved. For families, it improves stability and support during critical times without sacrificing long-term financial security or job prospects. It fosters a more engaged, committed and productive workforce while reducing business turnover costs. And for the economy overall, higher labor force participation among adults—especially underrepresented groups such as women—signals greater economic prosperity.

C. Balancing Health, Caregiving, and Work

Employees sometimes need time off work to manage their personal health and caregiving responsibilities. The U.S. Department of Labor categorizes four types of leave¹¹⁴.

Unpaid Time Off

- Permits an employee to take leave from work without pay.
- Job protection is guaranteed for employees who meet the criteria for the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA); however, some workers not protected by FMLA can be fired if they take unpaid time off work.
- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics¹¹⁵, in 2023, government employees have the highest access to unpaid family leave benefits (94%), followed by civilian workers (90%) and private industry workers (89%).
- Only 44% of US workers are eligible for FMLA.

Paid Time Off (PTO)

- Includes vacation time, paid sick days, and personal days.
- There are no federal PTO laws.

Paid Sick Time

- Permits employees to take paid time away from work to manage personal and often familial acute and preventive health care needs.
- Workers with paid sick time typically have eight days to use per year.
- Fifteen states, Washington DC, and 21 counties and cities have laws mandating at least some paid sick leave¹¹⁶ for certain workers.
- Correspondingly, access to paid sick time has increased in recent years. 2023 Bureau of Labor Statistics¹¹⁷ data reveal 92% of state and local government workers, 80% of all civilian, and 78% of private industry employees can access at least one paid sick day; however, part-time workers¹¹⁸ (43%) and specific workers such as food preparation and child care workers have much lower rates (27%)¹¹⁹.

Paid Family Medical Leave

- Can be used for:
 - *Personal serious or longer-term health conditions*, including chronic or acute physical or mental illness or injury necessitating inpatient care or ongoing treatment by a doctor or authorized medical provider;
 - *Parental leave* (maternity, paternity, or leave to connect with a recently adopted/fostered child);
 - *Caregiving* for spouse, dependent children, or parent with a “serious” medical condition;
 - *Active military deployment-related leave*; and
 - Sometimes, *bereavement or safety-related* leaves pertaining to *domestic or sexual violence*.
- The U.S. is among eight nations in the world¹²⁰ (e.g., Papua New Guinea, Suriname, Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, and Tonga), and the only Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development¹²¹ (OECD) country that lacks a federal paid maternity leave policy.
- The proportion of employees entitled to paid family leave benefits is low but has increased over time. For example, between 2014 and 2023, the percentage of workers with access to paid family leave benefits increased from 16% to 28% for state and local government workers, from 13% to 27% for civilian workers, and from 12% to 27% for private industry workers¹¹⁵.
- Access to paid leave varies by occupational sector¹¹⁵, with higher levels of paid family leave available to management/professional (39%) and sales/office (29%) workers compared to production/transportation (20%), construction/maintenance (19%), and service (16%) workers. Low-wage workers (5%), which are more frequently women and racial and ethnic minorities, and part-time workers (14%) have minimal access to paid family leave¹¹⁷.

D. Federal Family Leave Legislation

The Family Medical Leave Act¹²² (FMLA)

- Provides job protection, health insurance coverage, and 12 weeks of leave without pay annually to those who work for an employer with 50+ workers in a 75-mile area for a minimum of a year and who worked for a threshold of 1250 hours in the prior year for their current employer, and require leave to take care of a serious personal health issue, or provide care to a newly born, recently adopted/fostered, or seriously ill child, spouse or parent.
- Twelve weeks of unpaid leave are available for qualifying reasons pertaining to a family member’s active service in the military and up to 26 weeks to attend to a close relative injured while in service.
- FMLA covers 56% of U.S. workers, according to a government survey.
- The Department of Labor reports 7% of workers indicated they needed but did not use FMLA the previous year. Most (66%) stated lack of financial means as the reason for not taking leave¹²³.
- 42% of U.S. employees are without access to any paid days of caregiving leave.

- Among workers eligible to take a family or medical leave¹²⁴, caring for their own health (51%) is the leading cause for employees to take FMLA leave, followed by parental leave (25%) and family caregiving (19%).
- The inability to afford leave disproportionately falls on low-income and racial and ethnic minority workers in low-quality jobs.
- Losing wages during times of illness or when a child or family member needs care is particularly challenging as this is a time when medication, medical visits, and necessary equipment expenses rise.

The Federal Employees Paid Leave Act of 2020 ¹²⁵

- Provides 12 weeks of paid parental leave to federal employees.

The Family First Coronavirus Response Act ¹²⁶

- A temporary law that included The Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act, which provided up to 10 days of paid sick leave, and The Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act, which provided up to 10 weeks of paid family leave to qualified employees for reasons due to COVID-19 between April and December 2020.

E. Michigan Policies Regarding Paid Leave

Local Government Labor Regulatory Limitation Act

- Passed in 2015, Michigan is one of 24 states¹²⁷ to enact a preemption law,¹²⁸ which prohibits passage of a local ordinance that could mandate paid sick or family leave in a county or city.

Earned Paid Sick Time Act/Paid Medical Leave Act

- Michigan voters sponsored a citizen's petition¹²⁹ to secure paid sick days.
- In response, Michigan legislators preemptively passed¹²⁹ a law in 2018 mandating paid sick leave for certain employees.
- This law was amended and rebranded as a paid medical leave law.¹³⁰ Eligibility and coverage were modified¹³¹ at that time. A Michigan judge ruled that the legislators improperly amended the law, but that decision was later overturned¹³² in an appellate court.
 - Michigan's Paid Medical Leave Act¹³¹ made paid leave available to employees over the age of 19 who work for an employer with at least 50 employees. Part-time employees who worked less than 25 hours per week in the preceding year are excluded. Eligible employees could bank up to 40 hours of paid medical leave to manage personal or family member illness, preventive care, closure of work or school for public health reasons, and domestic violence¹³³.
 - Despite its name, Michigan's Paid Medical Leave Act is typically excluded from lists of states that offer paid family medical leave.
- A Michigan Supreme Court ruling¹³⁴ July 31, 2024, restored Michigan's Earned Paid Sick Time Act (ESTA) effective February 21, 2025.

- Michigan’s Earned Paid Sick Time Act provides all employees in Michigan, except federal government workers, an opportunity to earn and use paid sick time. Employees working for firms with ten or fewer employees can use up to 40 hours of paid sick time per year and 32 hours of unpaid sick time. Employees employed by firms with greater than ten workers may use up to 72 hours of paid sick time each year¹³⁵.

State Paid Parental Leave

- In 2020, Governor Whitmer created a policy that allows workers employed by the State of Michigan access to 12 weeks of paid parental leave annually¹³⁶.

F. Family Leave Legislation in Other States

Thirteen states (California¹³⁷, Colorado¹³⁸, Connecticut¹³⁹, Delaware¹⁴⁰, Maine¹⁴¹, Massachusetts¹⁴², Maryland¹⁴³, Minnesota¹⁴⁴, New Jersey¹⁴⁵, New York¹⁴⁶, Oregon¹⁴⁷, Rhode Island, Washington, and Washington DC¹⁵⁰) have passed paid family medical leave laws. Four of these states¹⁵¹ (CA, NJ, RI, NY) built upon a long-standing Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) Program.

Other states have considered various policy provisions when crafting paid family medical leave laws.¹⁵² Some variations to consider include 1) expanding eligible caregiving relationships to include different family member relationships such as grandchildren, siblings, or any cohabitants; 2) adding qualified reasons for leave such as domestic violence or bereavement; 3) adjusting the size of the employers that are required to provide leave benefits; 4) reducing the number of hours the employee must have worked in the previous year to qualify for benefits; 5) reducing the length of employment before an employee becomes eligible for benefits; 6) expanding eligibility based on previous earnings; 7) increasing the number of weeks of leave available; 8) allowing stackable leave such as 12 weeks of parental leave and 12 weeks of caregiving leave in the same year; 9) extending the timeframe when leave can be taken to two years; 9) allowing intermittent use of leave in various time increments such as hourly; 10) payroll deduction rate; 11) wage replacement rate; 12) maximum weekly benefit; 13) portability of benefits; 14) job protection; 15) continuation of health insurance; 16) who pays the premium; 17) voluntary versus mandatory participation; 18) private or state run insurance model; and 19) implementation timeframe.

G. Paid Family Medical Leave Support and Opposition

Support

- The International Labour Organization¹⁵³ which is part of the United Nations, advocates for no less than 14 weeks of paid maternity leave financed by “social insurance or public funds” following birth, and wages equal to at least 2/3 of a mother’s wage before leave.
- Mothers from 74% of OECD countries¹⁵⁴ are provided a minimum of half a year of paid maternity leave, while 94% of countries provide mothers 14 weeks. 62% of OECD countries offer a minimum of 6 months of paid paternity leave for fathers, and 71% offer a minimum of 14 weeks. Additionally, 75% of OECD¹²¹ countries have a legal framework that allows employees to take paid leave to tend to a seriously ailing family member.

- Other entities who advocate for paid family medical leave¹⁵⁵ include the AFL-CIO, Black Women’s Roundtable, Economic Policy Institute, The Center for Economic Policy Research, United Steelworkers, American Public Health Association, American Psychiatric Association Women’s Caucus, Autism Society of America, La Leche League, March of Dimes, NAACP, National Education Association, National Council on Developmental Disabilities, American Heart Association, and the Gerontological Society of America.
- Supporters suggest paid family medical leave is an investment in society that results in improvements in maternal and child health, lower rates of infant mortality, and long-term attachment of mothers, caregivers, and employees who have health problems to the workforce, thereby strengthening families and reducing poverty and public welfare reliance.

Opposition

- Some entities oppose paid family leave legislation. For example, the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) has advocated against¹⁵⁶ paid family medical leave, expressing concern that it removes existing protections for employers to handle worker absences, incentivizes absence from work, increases hardship associated with adequate staffing, compounds administrative burden and jeopardizes the financial stability of businesses.
- Similarly, the Small Business Association of Michigan¹⁵⁷ has expressed concern that a paid family medical leave mandate would harm small businesses and increase business costs. Small Business Association of Michigan members oppose¹⁵⁸ proposed paid family leave legislation, with 70% of responding members indicating it would be "extremely detrimental" to their business.
- The Michigan Chamber of Commerce helped establish the "United Against Workplace Mandates Coalition," comprised of business associations and area chambers of commerce expressing opposition to paid leave legislation. They are concerned a paid family leave law might increase the tax burden for both employers and employees, create government bureaucracy, increase worker shortages and worker absences from work, reduce existing leave offered voluntarily by employers, and increase costs¹⁵⁹.
- Other entities who expressed opposition¹⁶⁰ include but are not limited to the Michigan Manufacturers Association, Great Lakes Growth Coalition¹⁶¹, the Detroit Regional Chamber¹⁶², and the Grand Rapids Chamber, Business Leaders for Michigan, Home Builders Association of Michigan, Michigan Association of Convenience Stores, Michigan Licensed Beverage Association, Michigan Manufacturers Association, Michigan Nursery & Landscape Association, Michigan Petroleum Association, and Michigan Retailers Association.
- United Against Workplace Mandates advocates¹⁶³ for “a voluntary paid family leave law allowing, or even incentivizing, businesses to provide family leave benefits through private insurance — allowing flexibility in determining weeks of leave, wage replacement rates, payroll deduction rates, and maximum weekly benefit.”
- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce supported passage of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020, the first federal law mandating paid sick and family leave for a large percentage of U.S. employees. This law was passed with broad bipartisan support¹⁶⁴. Following the expiration of this temporary law, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce documented support¹⁶⁵ for a national up to 12-week paid family leave policy utilizing an employee payroll deduction funding model to cover paid leave for life events specified in the FMLA (with the

possibility of adding care for grandparents) to “minimize the financial, administrative and operational burdens” (p. 55).

Public View

The American public overwhelmingly supports paid family medical leave.

- A 2018 nationally representative survey¹⁶⁶ of 1004 registered voters found a majority of Democratic (94%), Republican (74%), and independent voters (83%) favor a comprehensive paid family leave policy, which includes parental, caregiving, and personal medical leave for all U.S. employees. A combination of employer and employees splitting the cost is the most highly supported funding model among those surveyed.
- A 2021 Politico/Morning Consult survey¹⁶⁷ found 7 in 10 registered voters indicate support for paid family medical leave for new parents, with 67% of all voters surveyed supporting six or more weeks of paid leave.
- Similarly, a 2021 Global Strategy Group survey¹⁶⁸ of voters from battleground states found 84% of voters, including 96% of Democrats, 91% of undecided voters, 81% of independents, and 74% of Republicans favor paid leave generally with 88% of all voters endorsing support for paid leave to ‘care for new child,’ ‘care for a seriously ill family member’ (91%), and those ‘suffering from a serious illness’ (94%, page 2). Over 75% of voters polled strongly or somewhat agree that “paid leave cannot wait...” (page 2). Nearly 70% of voters supported paid leave even if it raises their taxes. (p. 4)”
- A 2021 CBS poll¹⁶⁹ found 73% of respondents favor government funding for paid family medical leave¹⁶⁹.
- A Deloitte survey¹⁷⁰ found that 50% of employees prefer increased parental leave benefits over a pay raise.

IV. Summary:

- This report reviewed the existing scholarly literature to evaluate the known impact of paid family leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, and paid health-related leave on business and health outcomes, with extra attention paid to studies centered in the U.S.
- Overall, there is more evidence that paid family and medical leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, and paid leave for health-related reasons increases labor force participation, reduces turnover, reduces employer wage costs, and has a positive or neutral impact on the labor market, business profitability, and worker morale.
- These policies do not impact productivity or administrative burden.
- Empirical studies find that most businesses, including small businesses, have a favorable view of paid family medical leave mandates. This support grows as companies increase their experience using a state-paid family leave system. The business leaders surveyed did not see any evidence of employees abusing the program.

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^a NOTE: Microsoft Copilot was used to optimize this report with careful and attentive direction from the author.

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