

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
MINORITY (202) 225-5074
<https://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney Committee on Oversight and Reform Hearing – “Leading by Example: The Need for Comprehensive Paid Leave for the Federal Workforce and Beyond” June 24, 2021

Good morning. Today, we will discuss the dire need for comprehensive paid leave in the United States—and the steps Congress can take to meet that need.

In 2019, Congress passed my landmark legislation guaranteeing paid parental leave for the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child for more than 2 million federal employees. This was a quantum leap forward, and it put the government in a strong position to recruit and retain a talented, diverse workforce.

But we cannot rest now, because there is much more work to be done. We need to build on this historic achievement by bringing the federal government’s employment policies in line with leading companies in the private sector—and, indeed, with the rest of the world.

That’s why, in January, I introduced H.R. 564, the Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act. This bill would finally provide federal employees with comprehensive paid family and medical leave. That means employees would have access to paid leave if they get sick, need to care for an ill family member, or need to miss work due to a family member’s military deployment. The Family and Medical Leave Act guarantees unpaid leave for these reasons, but unpaid leave is untenable for too many federal workers.

This is a policy that is long overdue for the federal workforce—and for the nation. The federal government has the opportunity to lead the way on paid leave and fostering a family-friendly workplace.

While providing access to paid parental leave was critically important and long overdue, it’s just as important to provide access to paid family and medical leave too. Illnesses and military deployments are not events that can be planned for—as we’ve all learned in the past year, illness can strike any of us, at any time.

Is it fair to ask workers to make an agonizing choice between caring for a family member or continuing to receive a paycheck? The answer, clearly and unequivocally, is no. These are choices that no one should have to make.

The coronavirus pandemic has demonstrated—dramatically and undeniably—the need for paid family leave. Too many Americans lacked access to paid family leave during the pandemic, with devastating consequences. Expanding access to paid leave is an integral part to a strong and equitable recovery.

Just as importantly, after a year of a global pandemic that has killed 600,000 Americans, why do we tolerate policies that actually create an incentive for workers to come to work sick because they can’t afford to take unpaid time off? Does anyone seriously believe that this is good public policy?

Our Committee has been working hard to fix these problems. We championed a provision of the American Rescue Plan that established a \$570 million fund in the U.S. Treasury to provide up to 15 weeks of paid coronavirus-related leave for all federal employees, including postal workers.

This was an essential component of our nation’s response to the pandemic, but paid leave is just as important for workers facing any kind of family health crisis.

That's why we're proposing to take the necessary next step by providing paid family and medical leave to all federal employees.

Let's be clear: Paid leave would benefit both workers and employers. You don't have to take my word for it: today, we will hear from a small business employer on why this policy is in fact good for business.

Employers in states that have adopted a paid leave program largely report that it is more convenient to administer and improves competitiveness. In fact, support for a national paid leave policy among both large and small businesses is quickly growing. The federal government, as the largest employer in the nation, can and must serve as an example in creating a family-friendly workplace.

According to a 2018 survey by the National Partnership for Women and Families, 84% of Americans support paid family and medical leave, including large majorities of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. I have introduced versions of this bill since 2000, often with Republican support.

This should be an issue that has the kind of bipartisan support in Washington that it has throughout the country.

H.R. 564 is an investment in the people who keep the government running. We all have an interest in strengthening the federal workforce and making sure that the federal government is an employer that attracts and retains top talent.

I am encouraged that President Biden and Vice President Harris have made universal paid leave a cornerstone of their ambitious American Families Plan.

In addition to establishing a national paid leave program, the American Families Plan would make child care more affordable, invest in early and post-secondary education, and make permanent tax credits that help working families, like the child tax credit. These provisions would build the infrastructure needed to bolster economic recovery and help families.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in Congress to advance the Administration's plan to help families emerge from the pandemic stronger and more financially secure for the future.

The Comprehensive Paid Leave for Federal Employees Act is one piece of the vision the Administration has laid out. It will strengthen the federal workforce over the long term, and is a roadmap for the federal government to lead by example in creating a fair and safe workplace.

###

Contact: Emma Dulaney, Deputy Communications Director, (202) 226-5181