



National Center for Children in Poverty  
Mailman School of Public Health  
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**For Immediate Release**

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**Report: UNPAID FAMILY LEAVE IS NOT ENOUGH  
IN ABSENCE OF ADEQUATE FED POLICY, STATES ACT AS MODELS**

**New York City, Mar. 11, 2009** – Only about half of all American workers are eligible for even unpaid leave under existing law; for low-wage workers in particular, the prospect of lost wages often discourages them from taking time off for the birth of a baby or to tend to a sick family member. A new report looks at how states can address federal policy failures and better support our nation’s working families.

This week, the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, released “Paid Leave in the States: A Critical Support for Low-Wage Workers and Their Families.” Researchers conclude that despite the existence of unpaid family leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), national policy excludes many workers and provides no wage replacement to those it does include, leaving states to lead the way in supporting family-friendly paid leave.

“Job-protected, paid family leave helps to promote family economic security – especially among low-wage workers, who are placed at greater risk by lost wages and less likely to have jobs that offer paid leave,” says NCCP policy associate Sarah Fass, who wrote the report.

“Paid family leave also promotes improved child and family health and well-being,” she adds. “Research indicates that when mothers delay their return to work, they experience fewer depressive symptoms and their babies are healthier, while fathers who take longer leave are more likely to be involved in caring for their children.”

Since the 1970s, states have been active in developing improved family leave policy; several even had some form of unpaid leave before the 1993 enactment of FMLA. More recently, a handful of states have begun tackling the issue of paid family leave. In 2002, California passed legislation for paid family leave. Washington and New Jersey have since done the same. Other states, such as New York, are making efforts to enact paid family leave in the coming year.

“These states have broken new ground with their efforts to protect families’ ability to juggle work and family,” notes Donna Dolan, chair of the New York State Paid Family Leave Coalition. “We are optimistic that New York will also soon stand out as a leader in promoting family-friendly work practices.”

NCCP recommends that, until there is adequate federal policy, states adopt the following strategies for guiding efforts to enact paid leave policies that best support low-wage workers and their families:

- Ensure adequate wage replacement;
- Guarantee job protection;
- Extend coverage to part-time workers and employees of small businesses;

- Ensure that the length of leave is sufficient, allowing the 12-week minimum that child development experts say is best; and
- Use a broader definition of family to address the wide range of family responsibilities not acknowledged by FMLA, such as caring for siblings, grandparents, in-laws and others.

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*The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation's leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America's low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.*

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