

Remarks for Senator Kirsten Gillibrand
Testimony for Social Security, Pensions, and Family Policy of the Committee on Finance:
“Examining the Importance of Paid Family Leave for American Working Families”
Wednesday, July 11, 2018

Thank you, Chairman Cassidy and Ranking Member Brown, for holding this very important hearing today.

Here’s the truth: At some point, every one of us is going to have a situation where we just need to take some time to be with our families and take care of them.

It might be a medical emergency – maybe your spouse is diagnosed with cancer – or maybe you suddenly need to care for an aging parent who’s been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, or maybe you’re starting a new family and just had a baby.

Whatever the case, no working American should ever have to choose between their family and their paycheck.

But if you don’t have paid leave, then that’s exactly the choice you have to make. And this is especially true if you are working a low-wage job.

And that’s unfortunately what millions of Americans have to deal with every time there’s a family emergency.

Right now, 85% of all American workers don’t have access to paid family and medical leave.

And lower-income workers are even less likely to have it.

We are the only industrialized country in the world that doesn’t guarantee some form of paid leave to workers.

Recent reports have shown that this costs families \$20 billion a year.

And it also creates a sticky floor, where too many women get stuck in low-wage jobs with no way to advance, every time they come back from taking paid leave.

So Congress desperately needs to catch up. We need a national paid leave program now.

The good news is that both parties recognize this problem.

Individual states are taking the lead, all over the country, with many bipartisan state laws.

And I’m grateful that my Republican colleagues are committed to supporting a national paid leave program that’s based on a social insurance model.

But I urge them to support the comprehensive and fiscally responsible FAMILY Act.

Here’s why:

First, the FAMILY Act is an earned benefit. It stays with you throughout your life, wherever you work, wherever you live.

Second, the FAMILY Act is affordable, especially compared to the cost of inaction. It only costs as much as a cup of coffee per week, and it provides 66 percent of your wages, which is very important for low-wage workers.

Third, the FAMILY Act covers all workers, including part-time workers, for any event a family might face. Three out of four people who take unpaid FMLA leave, take it for reasons other than the birth of a new child. The FAMILY Act covers birth and adoption, taking care of an older family member, or addressing one's own personal medical needs.

Fourth, the FAMILY Act levels the playing field for small businesses, so they can actually compete for talent with the Googles and Facebooks of the world. That's why it has been endorsed by small business groups.

It has also been endorsed by many larger business, many of which provide leave. They know that paid leave is good for profit, it's good for employee retention, it's good for productivity, and it's good for morale.

And finally, the FAMILY Act does not create the false choice between covering someone during a medical emergency today, and cutting their social security retirement benefits later.

It doesn't take money from the social security trust fund, which would harm the current and future financial security of our seniors.

People can and should be able to have paid leave while they're working and a safe and secure retirement later on.

This is a good bill that's been endorsed by a coalition that includes Fortune 500 companies and small business. It's good for workers, it's good for businesses, and it's good for the country.

I urge my colleagues to support the FAMILY Act, and I encourage this committee to continue paying attention to this important issue.

Thank you.