

Statement as Prepared for Delivery
Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D.
Committee on Finance
Paid Leave Working Group
June 18, 2020, 11 am

Good morning. Thank you, Senator Hassan, for co-chairing this Working Group and Roundtable. I also thank Senate Finance Committee Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Wyden for their support, the members of the paid leave working group for participating, along with Senate colleagues and outside experts who are here today.

The Covid-19 pandemic is creating many problems for Americans, but is particularly burdensome to new parents. Because of Covid-19, exhausted new parents are far less likely to have support from extended family members, who in normal time assist with newborn care, monitor for post-partum health issues, and help new parents adjust. New parents face tougher decisions than usual on when to send their infant to child care so they can return to work. In the Covid-19 era, paid leave is absolutely essential to protect vulnerable infants, financially support parents, and ensure babies have a healthy start to life.

Pre- pandemic, the lack of paid family leave forced 25% of new mothers to return to work within 10 days of giving birth. This is despite paid parental leave being proven to reduce infant mortality rates, improve infant health, improve child development outcomes, and reduce reliance on public assistance. New parents need help. That is why Senator Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, Representative Colin Allred of Texas, and Representative Elise Stefanik of New York and I introduced the **Advancing Support for Working Families Act**, the first bipartisan, bicameral plan to provide Americans with upfront financial assistance in the critical first year after birth or adoption.

The **Advancing Support for Working Families Act** would help working families cover the cost of leave and other expenses associated with a new child by giving parents the option of advancing up to \$5,000 from their future child tax credits upon the birth or adoption of a child. This plan is flexible, and provides struggling families with a solution now – without raising taxes, nor creating new employer mandates, and not disincentivizing other federal, state, and employer efforts.

A number of colleagues here today have proposed plans to provide paid leave to new parents. Covid-19 is exacerbating a problem we all agree needs a solution. This is why there should be a national pilot of paid parental leave. Forcing new parents to choose time off with their newborn or earning a living is not the right answer. Especially not during Covid-19.

Ensuring that those ill with Covid-19 can afford to stay home is the best way to slow the spread of Covid-19. The emergency family leave provisions in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act have helped in that regard, but may need refining. I look forward to working with colleagues to solve these issues to bring solutions to American families.