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Contact: Nicole L'Esperance Nicole_LEsperance@wyden.senate.gov

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Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Paid Leave Roundtable
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Let me start out by thanking Senators Hassan and Cassidy, who are leading this effort on paid leave for the Finance Committee. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has really hammered home why paid leave is so important to America's families, so I thank our co-chairs for bringing this meeting together, and I look forward to hearing from all of our speakers today.

The pandemic has brought on an extraordinarily difficult time for a lot of American families and workers. Nationwide, COVID-19 has essentially plateaued with thousands of deaths every week and tens of thousands of new infections. In some places it's getting better, but in a lot of the country it's getting worse. Despite that, a lot of governors and local leaders in places where the pandemic is getting worse are plowing ahead with reopening.

That means a lot of people are going to need time off work, whether it's because they test positive or they need to care for a family member who does. But for people without access to paid sick days and paid family and medical leave, following public health guidelines can mean choosing between getting a paycheck and taking care of their or a family member's health.

In March, the Congress passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. That law, for the first time, set federal requirements for paid sick days and paid leave for some caregiving purposes during the COVID-19 public health emergency. It was a step in the right direction, but there are still big gaps in access to paid leave. Senators Gillibrand and Murray have offered legislation to close these gaps during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I am supportive of their proposal.

This issue is not just about health care. It's also about financial security for working families. U.S. had a robust paid sick leave and paid family and medical leave structure in place before COVID-19, it would be saving a lot of people from hardship as this crisis goes on. It's fortunate that people have been able to rely on supercharged unemployment benefits as a lifeline for paying the rent and putting food on the table. But these benefits are in no way a replacement for programs guaranteeing paid sick days and paid leave at the federal level. This will be even more important as states move toward reopening the economy amid this public health emergency.

This issue isn't new because of the pandemic. But the pandemic has revealed to the entire country that paid leave is one of the key ways to help people who walk an economic tightrope every day.

I look forward to hearing from all of the presenters here today about how to address the remaining gaps in access to these critical programs, particularly for low-wage workers, while protecting bedrock safety net programs like Social Security that Americans so desperately need.

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