

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 16, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House of Representatives
United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader, House of Representatives
United States Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy,

We are writing to express our support for passing a universal, comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy as part of the Build Back Better infrastructure package.

The coronavirus pandemic has shone a spotlight on the caregiving crisis facing our nation and the harm this has caused to our constituents. Women, and especially women of color, have found their economic security in jeopardy as they have been pushed out of the workforce in record numbers. Women's labor force participation is at a 33-year record low, and women globally lost over \$800 billion in income due to the Covid-19 pandemic.¹ If Congress passes a physical infrastructure bill alone, 90 percent of the jobs will go to men - women need a care infrastructure plan to truly recover from the pandemic.

Many of us have long supported universal, comprehensive paid family and medical leave as cosponsors of the [FAMILY Act \(H.R. 804\)](#). The benefits of paid family and medical leave are vast, yet more than 100 million people – or 79 percent of workers – do not have paid family leave through their jobs, and 60 percent lack access to paid personal medical leave through their employer.² Access rates for workers in lower-wage jobs are even lower,³ and women of color are especially harmed by the lack of paid leave due to racial disparities.⁴ This means that when serious personal or family health needs inevitably arise, people face impossible choices between their families' well-being, their financial security and their jobs.

¹ Oxfam International (2021, April 29), COVID-19 cost women globally over \$800 billion in lost income in one year. Retrieved 1 June 2021, from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/covid-19-cost-women-globally-over-800-billion-lost-income-one-year#:~:text=The%20COVID%2D19%20crisis%20cost.3.9%20percent%20loss%20for%20men>.

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020, September). National Compensation Survey: Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2020 (Tables 16 and 31). Retrieved 15 December 2020, from <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2020/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2020.pdf>

³ Ibid; National Partnership for Women & Families. (2019, September). New Data Show Slow Progress on Increasing Access to Paid Leave and Paid Sick Days [Press release]. Retrieved 15 December 2020, from <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-impact/news-room/press-statements/new-data-show-slow-progress-on-access-to-paid-leave-paid-sick-days.html>

⁴ Joshi, P., Baldiga, M., & Huber, R. (2020). Unequal access to FMLA leave persists.. Retrieved 23 November 2020 from Brandeis University, The Heller School, Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy website: <http://new.diversitydatakids.org/research-library/data-visualization/unequal-access-fmla-leave-persistsIbid>.

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While the promise of vaccination offers hope that the pandemic will end sometime in 2021, the long-term health and caregiving consequences of COVID-19 are just beginning to surface. The United States had more than 20 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 by late 2020; an estimated 10 to 15 percent – 1.7 to 3.4 million people – will experience persistent or relapsing symptoms, which can interfere with the ability to work or require care from a loved one.⁵ And communities of color will likely face the greater burden, as they have already throughout the pandemic with higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and death from Covid-19.⁶

Given the dire need for a universal paid leave program, we are thrilled that both President Biden and Chairman Neal have introduced universal paid family and medical leave programs that build off of the FAMILY Act. Both plans provide comprehensive coverage for all working people and are structured equitably and would significantly improve the lives of all working people.

We want to highlight several of the provisions in these plans that will ensure an equitable paid leave program that meets the needs of our constituents. First, both provide universal access to twelve weeks of paid leave for all working people, regardless of where they live or work, and we support passing a plan that allows people to receive benefits as quickly as possible. Second, both provide paid leave for all purposes covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act: to bond with a new child, to care for a family member's medical condition, to care for one's own serious medical condition, and for certain military caregiving and exigency purposes. We also strongly support President Biden's inclusion of leave to deal with domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault, as well as three days of bereavement leave. We appreciate that both proposals expand on the definition of family member under the FMLA for caregiving purposes to include a broad range of family members, including chosen family, which is particularly necessary for LGBTQ and multi-generational families. Third, both include a progressive wage replacement rate, which will help provide needed economic security to low-income families and ensure they receive an amount of income that does not jeopardize their financial well-being.

In addition to the strong policy components of Chairman Neal and President Biden's plans, we also want to highlight that increasing access to job-protected leave will be critical in helping our nation's families and economy recover and rebuild from the coronavirus pandemic. A staggering 44 percent of the workforce is ineligible to take job-protected leave under the FMLA,⁷ meaning that they could qualify for paid leave under Chairman Neal or President Biden's plans, but could

⁵ Scientific understanding of this new disease is still developing and estimates vary of the incidence of lasting health effects of COVID-19; currently 10 to 15 percent is a conservative estimate for symptoms lasting longer than 90 days, particularly among patients with severe illness. See Cirulli, E. T., Schiabor Barrett, K. M., Riffle, S., Bolze, A., et al. (2020, December 1). Long-term COVID-19 symptoms in a large unselected population. medRxiv. Preprint. doi: 10.1101/2020.10.07.20208702; del Rio, C., Collins, L. F., & Malani, P. (2020, October 5). Long-term Health Consequences of COVID-19. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 324(17): 1723-1724. doi: 10.1001/jama.2020.19719; Yelin, D., Wirtheim, E., Vetter, ++P., Kalil, A. C., et al. (2020, September 1). Long-term consequences of COVID-19: research needs. *The Lancet: Infectious Diseases*. 20(10): P1115-1117. doi: 10.1016/S1473-3099(20)30701-5

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021, May 26), Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity. Retrieved 1 June 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html#footnote02>.

⁷ Brown, S., Herr, J., Roy, R., & Klerman, J. A. (2020, July). Employee and Worksite Perspectives of the Family and Medical Leave Act: Results from the 2018 Surveys. Abt Associates Publication prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor. Retrieved 15 December 2020, from https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/WHD_FMLA2018SurveyResults_FinalReport_Aug2020.pdf

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get fired for taking it. This is particularly harmful for low-wage workers, who are disproportionately women of color.

As we work to rebuild our economy, we must address structural inequities that were major drivers of crisis and economic instability in the pandemic. Investments in care infrastructure and policies that support workers, such as paid leave, are critical to an equitable recovery for all workers. The American Rescue Plan laid important groundwork for lasting, equitable change and delivered results for America's women and families. We look forward to expanding those investments to rebuild our country's care infrastructure, including with universal, comprehensive paid family and medical leave.

Sincerely,



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress



Judy Chu
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Andy Levin
Member of Congress

Doris Matsui
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