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MEDIA CONTACT:

Marianne Bellesorte:

Vice President of Policy, Strategy & Communications
PathWays PA
310 Amosland Road
Holmes, PA 19043
(p) 610-543-5022 ext. 209
mbellesorte@pathwayspa.org



PHILADELPHIA AND PENNSYLVANIA ELECTED LEADERS TO CALL FOR EXPANSION OF WORK-FAMILY PROTECTIONS

Celebrating Two Decades with the Family and Medical Leave Act

Affordable Family Leave Programs Strengthen Families, Boost Economy Elected Officials to Discuss Upcoming Legislation

PHILADELPHIA, PA—Elected officials, economists, business owners, and parents marked the 20-year anniversary of the implementation of the groundbreaking Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) by holding a lunch press conference about the economic and family benefits of FMLA and calling for an expansion of affordable family leave policies. Legislators announced Fall 2013 hearings on issues involving FMLA and work-family protections.

“FMLA is a just way for us all to balance our lives whether in times of joy or grief,” said Jacqueline Womelsdorf, a Philadelphia resident, “but it’s now time to expand those protections to ensure security to all family members.” Ms. Womelsdorf had access to the FMLA as maternity leave, but she returned to work early because her family could not afford the unpaid time off.

Signed by President Bill Clinton, FMLA was the first federal law that guaranteed Americans protected time to care for loved ones. FMLA offers 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave, which workers can use to care for a new baby, a sick family member, or to recover from an illness. Since its implementation in August 1993, FMLA leave has been used more than [100 million times](#) by an estimated [35 million](#) men and women. FMLA is enormously popular, with [88 percent](#) of Americans supporting the law and the vast majority of businesses reporting that the FMLA is easy to comply with.

But two-fifths of the workforce is not covered by FMLA, and [several million workers](#) each year who are eligible and need leave don’t take it because they cannot afford to go without pay. Federal FMLA leaves out workers in smaller companies and many part-timers; it has a narrow definition of family that [does not include domestic partners](#) or siblings; and it does not cover routine illnesses.

“I made the difficult decision to resign my position of 17 years to help take care of my sister until she passed away,” said Anne Marie Pearson. “I often think, ‘Who would have taken care of Joanne if I did not sacrifice my livelihood and my job? Unfortunately, today’s economy is not one in which anyone can afford to choose between taking care of a family member or keeping their job.’”

To help fill in the gaps and increase economic security, constituents in Pennsylvania are fighting to pass legislation that would ensure all workers currently covered by the FMLA can also use that time to care for their siblings to benefit families who are currently forced to choose between caring for a loved one and financial security. Workers and activists across the country are advancing similar policies at the city and state level.

“While the Family and Medical Leave Act allows an employee to take unpaid leave to care for a child or parent, it fails to address the problem of family members who become ill, but have no children or parents to care for them,” said Representative Dan Truitt, lead sponsor of Joanne’s Law, which would allow siblings to care for each other using the FMLA. “This extension to the act is a commonsense measure that will bring families together.”

“FMLA was an important first step, but without expanding it to cover siblings and others, too many Pennsylvania workers are unable to put family first, or are forced into economic crisis when they need take care of a family,” said Marianne Bellesorte, Senior Director of Policy at PathWays PA. “Joanne’s Law will make family leave affordable and accessible, so working people are no longer forced to choose between their family and their economic security. When working people have enough money to cover the basics, that strengthens families and the whole economy.”

“Policies supporting paid leave, affordable childcare, and equal pay boost the economy by helping workers keep their families afloat during a serious illness or a birth,” said Councilman Bill Greenlee, who has championed earned paid sick days in City Council for several years. “Workers and activists across the country are advancing similar policies in a number of states, and I am proud to announce that we will be holding hearings on these issues in Council to see what policies make sense for Philadelphia.”

In 2002, [California](#) became the first state to implement a Paid Family Leave (PFL) program, followed in 2009 by [New Jersey](#). The programs have been enormously successful, with [1.4 million claims filed in California](#) and [100,000 filed in New Jersey](#) since their implementation, and high levels of support among business owners and workers. Now [Rhode Island](#) has joined them with a precedent-setting law that protects the jobs of all workers who need to use the fund. In Washington State, a paid leave program awaits funding. New York State is the next state likely to pass a family leave insurance program. Connecticut and several other states are laying the groundwork for similar legislation.

Cities and states nationwide have also been adopting earned sick time policies to address routine short-term health needs not covered by FMLA. This spring, [Portland, Oregon](#) and [New York City](#) became the fourth and fifth U.S. cities to pass a paid sick days law. Last November, Long Beach, California approved the policy for hotel workers. Statewide bills are moving forward in [Vermont](#), [Massachusetts](#), Oregon and elsewhere. These recent wins and active campaigns build on past victories in [Connecticut](#), [Seattle](#), [Washington, D.C.](#), and [San Francisco](#). At the federal level, Rep. Rosa DeLauro and Sen. Tom Harkin introduced the [Healthy Families Act](#) in February, which would set a national sick days standard.

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This event is hosted by the Coalition for Healthy Families and Workplaces, which was formed in 2009 to support the needs of families and businesses in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania. The Coalition currently consists of 110 groups and organizations including non-profit organizations, businesses, and labor groups. Read the [personal stories of working people](#) across the country that benefitted from FMLA, or suffered due to the lack of protection.

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PathWays PA was founded in 1978 as the Women’s Association for Women’s Alternatives. It served as one of Pennsylvania’s first residential programs to keep low-income, vulnerable women together with their children and has grown to become one of the Greater Philadelphia Region’s foremost providers of residential and community-based services for women, children and families. Each year over 6,000 women, children and families benefit from our full complement of social services; job training and employment assistance; as well as outreach and residential programs as they move along the path to self-sufficiency.