

EQUITY FOR ALL KIDS



To: Economic Matters Committee
From: Jennifer Bevan-Dangel, Executive Director
Re: HB 839; Labor and Employment - Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program - Establishment
Date: February 24, 2020
Position: Support

Advocates for Children and Youth supports House Bill 839, which would provide parents (as well as other critical caregivers) with a paid leave program to take care of their children.

Extensive research has been developed that shows how critical the first three months are for the development of a baby's brain.¹ A secure, attentive home environment in the first three months impacts social, emotional, and intellectual development over the course of a child's life. This is also a critical time for parents to learn to care for their child, a transition that is often difficult and stressful even when the parent is able to stay home. Balancing work and parenthood, especially in those first few months, causes stress and anxiety for parent and child alike, and interrupts the critical bonding period.

Yet too often, economic realities prevent parents from making the decision over staying home or continuing to work post-partum. Nationally, just 35% of private sector working women and 11% of private sector working men have paid leave. Across all employment types, nationwide only 22% of women and 9% of men are employed at worksites that offer paid maternity leave to all female employees. While FMLA might provide some guaranteed leave for employees at larger employment sites, because the leave is unpaid it does not guarantee that parents can afford to take advantage of the time.

It is important to note that the bill is written inclusively, as there are many situations in which a parent may need to take time to welcome or care for a child. This includes not just birth and adoption but also foster placement and informal care placement. Ensuring a welcoming and secure transition into a new home for an older child, who often will be coming from a traumatic situation, is critical for providing the stable support that will help the child transition and succeed in his or her new home.

House Bill 839 would ensure that parents can afford to take the time they need to focus on their child, when that child needs them most. We urge a favorable report.

¹ <https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/204-the-child-development-case-for-a-national-paid-family-and-medical-leave-program>