

Testimony in Support of HB 839 “Labor and Employment - Family and Medical
Leave Insurance Program - Establishment”
Submitted to the House Economic Matters Committee
February 24, 2020

My name is Dr. Lawrence Reid. I am currently a Social Science Analyst in the Department of Health & Human Services, but I’m here today not to speak on their behalf, but rather as someone who has done extensive research in the field of maternal and child health. I also serve on the Board of the Maryland Family Network.

I am a social epidemiologist by training and completed my PhD at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. In my previous role as Director of Maternal and Child Health Epidemiology at the Maryland Department of Health, I regularly provided expert epidemiologic assessments of data in regards to social, biological, or environmental factors, that were central to improving maternal and child health outcomes. Often, we found that improving social factors would have the largest impact on improving health outcomes.

Access to Paid Family Leave is an example of a policy that can address an important social determinant of health, and that is access to healthcare. Paid Family Leave is important and needed because of a host researched benefits including:

- Greater access to doctor visits,
- Increased access to family bonding time,
- Higher rates of breastfeeding initiation and duration which confers positive health outcomes for children and mothers,
- Reduction in parental stress and depression,
- Lower PTB and LBW rates (antenatal leave),
- Fewer infant hospitalizations and when necessary, shorter NICU stays, and
- Better immunization adherence.

A survey of new mothers in Maryland found that mothers with paid postpartum leave were more likely to initiate breastfeeding (93% vs 88%); 30% more likely to still be breastfeeding past 5 months (63% vs 49%); and more likely to go to their postpartum check-up (96% vs 92%). Unfortunately, these benefits are not equitably distributed across race or class. Non-white parents are more likely to be employed part-time, or not at all, thus limiting their access to these paid maternity leave. This is more reason to increase availability of Paid Family Leave so these benefits may help eliminate disparities in maternal and child health outcomes.

Ultimately, for me as a father of a 4 year old and a 10 month old, I know we are blessed that my wife and I were able to take advantage of paid family leave provided by our employers. I know many families don’t have the advantage of employer provided benefits. This is a situation that we can fix by providing Paid Family Leave to all Marylanders.