



ZERO WEEKS



**ZERO WEEKS:
Putting
Families First**



DISCUSSION GUIDE



*Everyone should be able to be there for family,
no matter where they live or work.*

A Nation Without Paid Leave

U.S. stands nearly alone in the world in failing to guarantee any paid time for employees to heal from illness, to care for new children, or to be with family members facing a medical crisis. The documentary *Zero Weeks* tells the stories of families who are struggling to be present for their loved ones while meeting their work and financial obligations.

Most working people will need to care for themselves or for loved ones at some point, but fewer than one in five civilian workers have access to paid family leave through an employer, and only two in five have employer-provided temporary disability benefits. Not surprisingly, low-wage workers are the least likely to have any such time with pay, but even workers earning a living wage can see their income drop well below what they need to live. Making \$0 an hour because you need time for caregiving responsibilities is particularly hard when you have no cushion of savings or family members who can afford to help.

Being a good parent or following doctor's orders doesn't just cost people their pay—for many, it means loss of a job. Overall, one in seven workers has lost a job to recover from illness or care for a family member. Because women still bear major responsibility for caregiving, working mothers take an even harder hit. Almost one in five has lost a job due to sickness or caring for a sick child. Racial discrimination compounds the problem for low-paid workers of color, who traditionally earn less than white workers and have less access to paid family and medical leave. For these workers, loss of income or a job can mean a deeper plunge into economic turmoil.

Polling consistently shows that wide margins of Americans of all political stripes and faith traditions support a paid leave policy that will help them be both good family members and good employees. This is not a left/right issue but rather a moral issue of valuing families, caregiving, and economic security.

Inclusive paid family and medical leave means no one will have to choose between their life and their livelihood.

Nearly one in four mothers return to work within 10 days of giving birth, increasing the potential for maternal depression and negative health impacts for mom and baby.



Rev. Lashaundra McCarthy



Pastor Claire Dobbs



Imam Noman Hussain

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

After watching the film, discussion leaders may want to choose several questions from among the following:

1. What in the film surprised you the most?
2. Whose story most resonated with you?
3. "This society is just built and geared up to break down the family, to just split it up," Law, a dad of a premature baby, says. What are some ways a society can support healthy families?
4. "It is wildly detrimental to a person's heart, and soul, well-being when they're not able to be present for those they love in a time of need," says Pastor Claire Dobbs. What's it been like for you when you have had to be away from a loved one who needed you?
5. One of the families in *Zero Weeks* adopted a child from Nepal and faced a financial crisis when the adoption hit a snag. They received support from their church community, but needed additional help. What do you think is the proper role of faith communities in these situations? What is the proper role of government?
6. "It can't be that whether or not you have access to paid leave depends on what employer you work for, what part of the country you live in. It can't be a boss lottery," says one observer in the film. Do you agree? What are some of the reasons why the responsibility for paid leave can't fall on business owners' shoulders alone?
7. How does the film look at the issue of personal responsibility?
8. What are some financial costs to families, governments, and communities when people don't have paid family and medical leave?
9. How does paid family and medical leave contribute to a living wage and to equal pay for women?
10. What are some barriers to men's participation in caregiving? What can paid leave do to help them be more involved?
11. How is a federal paid family and medical leave program like Social Security and Medicare? What are the benefits of that approach?
12. The faith leaders in *Zero Weeks* note that strong families make for a strong nation. What connections do you see between the two?
13. Adoptive father Chad says, "We talk to our kids about how prayer is more than just folding your hands and looking up to the sky. Prayer is in the action you do." What kinds of actions could you take to help families get the paid time to care they need? What does your faith ask you to do to support families?



1 in 5 retirees leave the workforce earlier than planned to care for an ill family member.

How YOU Can Make a Difference

The moving stories in *Zero Weeks*—and your own family’s experience—may leave you wondering how you can help. As Imam Noman Hussain observes, once we know about the lack of protection for families, “that should leave the rest of us, as a community, restless.” People in the film became active after finding out that “what we can’t do on our own, we can do together.”

Across the country, working families, people of faith, advocates for children and seniors, health care professionals, labor leaders, business owners, and others are working to strengthen families by fighting for paid leave policies.

RIGHT NOW

Sign up at familyvaluesatwork.org. If you live in a state with an ongoing campaign, we will connect you. You’ll receive alerts and information on the federal campaign.

WHEN YOU GET HOME

Contact your Congressional representative via familyvaluesatwork.org/familyact. Say what the presence or absence of paid leave has meant in your life and why they should champion it. You can adapt this template and add a personal story.

IN THE COMING WEEKS

Gather a group from your congregation to share your personal paid leave stories, then write your Congressional representatives, draft letters to the editor, and plan other activities.

Arrange a screening of ***Zero Weeks: Putting Families First***. Let Family Values @ Work know your plans and we’ll get you a link or a DVD so you can show the film. Email us at info@familyvaluesatwork.org.

Meaningful legislation is pending before Congress right now. The federal FAMILY Act builds on models already operating in multiple states. It would cover all care, pool small contributions from employers and employees, and create a fund that is cost-effective and self-sustaining.



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