

FAMILY  
VALUES  
@ WORK

*Value All Care,  
Value Every Family*

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# *Value All Care, Value Every Family*

**More and more people** of all political persuasions acknowledge that paid leave is an issue whose time has come. As we enter the “not if but when” stage of creating public policy, we need to make sure the program values all care and values every family.

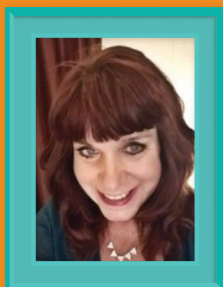
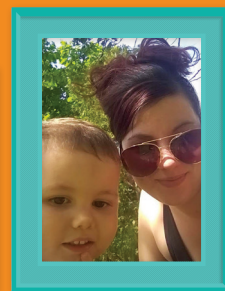
Parents urgently need paid time to welcome a new child into their homes. But more than three-quarters of those who take unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act do so to care for a loved one or for their own serious illness. Our paid leave program cannot leave them out.

The stories in this booklet come from people across the country. Each of them faced an unexpected injury or illness, like most of us do at some point. And like us, they just want to take care of themselves and their loved ones without falling off an economic cliff.

It would be very difficult to cure or prevent all the ailments described in this booklet. But it should not be difficult to reach bipartisan agreement on a paid leave plan that is accessible for all kinds of care and affordable to every family.

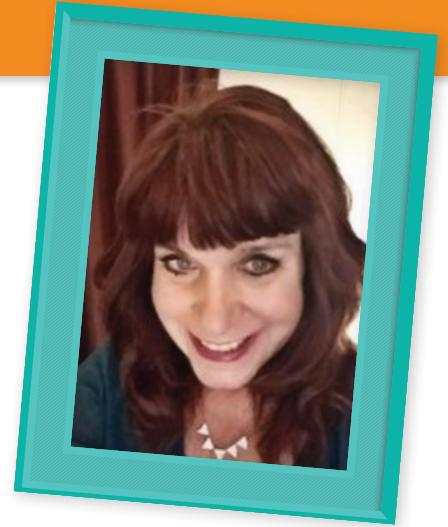


# *Caring For Yourself*



# *Caring For Yourself*

**Janet Valencia,** Tucson, Arizona



Several years ago when I was a single mom I worked as a registered nurse in Tucson, often through an agency with no paid leave. I did this so that I could arrange to work and also take care of my children. I traded shifts with coworkers, picked up night shifts, and got help from my mother just to make ends meet. If the kids were sick, my mother was usually available to help take care of them. Sometimes I had to miss work when my mother was not available, which meant losing that income. I don't know how we would have made it without her help. This delicate and precarious arrangement changed completely when I fell off the roof of my house and needed back surgery.

***“With my family in desperate financial straits, I had to go back to work much sooner than my doctor advised.”***

For the first three weeks after my surgery, my mother helped pay the bills, take care of the kids, and do everything she could. But my mom also had to work and had limited paid leave after using all the PTO that she had to care for my father during the three years he was acutely ill with multiple myeloma. With my family in desperate financial straits, I had to go back to work much sooner than my doctor advised. I was easily exhausted and often found the pain and fatigue nearly unbearable. Sometimes I had to go into work late or even ask for the day off without pay.

**Fewer than 40 percent of workers – and only 12 percent of low-wage workers – have access to short-term disability insurance for personal medical leave through their employers.**

We had to move to a less expensive side of town, into a very small mobile home, because I could no longer afford the rent on the house where we were living. I was



consumed by the fear of losing my job, yet needed to fully recover from my surgery. Not long after I called in sick to care for my daughter when she had a life-threatening illness, I was fired. Nothing can describe the feeling of being fired for “poor attendance” after struggling so hard to be an exemplary nurse. Next thing I knew I was ordered to pack up my belongings from my desk and escorted to my car by security guards as if I was a criminal.

If I’d had paid family leave – that safety net to protect us from unexpected circumstances such as these – it’s entirely possible that my family and I would not have suffered such disastrous consequences.

***“If I’d had paid family leave – that safety net to protect us from unexpected circumstances such as these – it’s entirely possible that my family and I would not have suffered such disastrous consequences.”***

# Caring For Yourself

Tara DeVee, Eugene, Oregon



**N**ine years ago I worked as a paid caregiver and also ran my own small business, a cleaning company. Then I got sick and needed gall bladder surgery. I had no paid leave and was not able to take the time I needed to rest and recover properly after my operation because I had two young kids and bills to pay. I pushed myself to go back to work even though I was tired and still feeling quite ill most days.

It was very hard on my kids to see me struggling so much. They had to pitch in and provide help and care for me in ways no young child should have to do for a parent. It affected their school work and was just difficult for all of us.

***“We need paid leave so we can recover from illness or injury without worrying about whether we’ll be able to make the rent.”***

Because I was in a weakened state and generally not feeling well, I didn’t realize that other symptoms I was experiencing were actually signs of a whole new problem. I was exhausted trying to keep up at work and get through each day. I felt more and more tired and didn’t know why. I thought my body was still just trying to heal from the surgery.

Small business owners say the lack of a national paid leave program puts them at a disadvantage.

It turned out I had been exposed to arsenic from my well water and the poison was causing a new illness. When I started having strange tingling sensations in my legs I finally went to the doctor, but it was too late. The toxin exposure had done so much damage, it led to my eventual paralysis.

I now use a wheelchair and rely on caregivers who come to my home daily to assist with basic tasks and



help me keep up the house. I appreciate my care providers. It's important to me that they are paid fairly and have opportunities for training and support in their jobs and a good quality of life, too. My partner, Ed, helps as much as he can but he is facing health challenges of his own including gradual loss of his eyesight. I worry about what will happen to him if I am not able to be here for him.

We need paid leave so we can pay attention to our bodies to heal and recover from illness or injury without worrying about whether we'll be able to make the rent while we rest – whether we are the one needing care ourselves, or are giving care to a loved one.

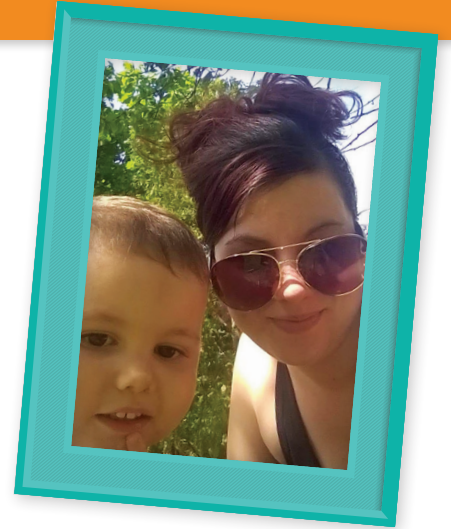
***“My kids had to pitch in in ways no young child should have to do for a parent.”***

# *Caring For Yourself*

**Elizabeth Fredette**, New Bedford, Massachusetts

In May of 2013, I was blessed with the gift of motherhood. Throughout my pregnancy I was faced with serious health concerns. I was being monitored by my physician as well as an oncologist. After a couple months, my once-a-week appointments turned into twice-a-week appointments.

As a first-time mother, I wasn't aware that maternity leave was unpaid. I was offered 8 to 12 weeks of unpaid leave by the non-profit where I worked and was given the option to use my earned sick time and vacation time. I had a total of three weeks paid. However, I used two weeks of that time for all the doctor appointments. My white blood cell levels were as elevated as someone diagnosed with cancer. Not only was I worried about my health and my baby, but I was faced with the uncertainty that I might not be able to financially support my child.



***“Not only was I worried about my health and my baby, but I was faced with the uncertainty that I might not be able to financially support my child.”***

So I did what any parent would do in that situation: I worked as many hours as I was allowed. My doctor suggested I remain on bed rest for the last month of my pregnancy, but I put in as many hours as I could, including holidays and 12-hour days.

Those who received no pay during leave were more likely to be female, poorer, less educated or younger than those who got at least some pay.

I started my maternity leave on January 6, 2014, and had my beautiful son on January 9 – only three short days to relax before my child was born. I quickly realized how expensive a newborn was, between diapers, wipes, formula and doctor appointments, my savings



were quickly depleted and my earned sick days and other time exhausted. I had no choice but to seek state assistance. I was turned away by the local office, told I was ineligible. Because I was employed, I couldn't seek unemployment. I had to make one of the most heartbreaking decisions of my life – to leave my child and return to work when he was only four weeks old.

I missed his first smile, his first laugh, the first time he rolled over, his first tummy time, the first time he discovered his hands and feet and how amazed he was. All these priceless memories I will never get back.

I was behind on bills. So I found myself once again working longer days and holidays, spending more time at work than I did at home, barely getting any sleep. Then I heard a speaker talk about the fight for paid leave. I kept thinking how amazing these options would have been for me and my family, and how hurt I was that I had to sacrifice so much because I had no other options. That's when I decided to get involved.

Paid family and medical leave would not only give financial stability, but something else so priceless and that's time to spend with a loved one who needs care.

***“Instead of bed rest, I worked 12-hour days.”***

# *Caring For Yourself*

**Kesha Scrivner**, District of Columbia

I have been a resident of the District for over 22 years. I was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer right before my daughter's second birthday. When I was diagnosed my surgeon, primary doctor, and oncologist recommended that I go on disability. But how could I? While paying market rent, electric, gas, childcare, food, and other essentials, I had to work throughout the treatments.



I worked the whole time during chemo until my body shut down on me. I worked every day during radiation – left work during my lunch hour, caught the train to GW Hospital, received radiation for an hour and then caught the train back to work. I had a partial mastectomy and had some paid time donated by co-workers. But it was not enough. I had to return to work before I was healed.

***“I need to be able to heal without worrying about how I’m going to pay my bills.”***

Once I get off of work I crash due to my body being so tired, weak, and in pain. I need to be able to be home and heal without worrying about how I’m going to pay my bills, instead of sitting at my desk in excruciating pain.

More than two-fifths of those who take FMLA leave for 10 days or less say they cut short their leave, mostly because they can’t afford the time or fear losing their job.

But life goes on, and so will I. It would mean a lot if the government of DC would support the residents in this city by passing the Universal Paid Leave Act.

***“But life goes on, and so will I. ”***



# *Caring For Yourself*

**Barb Gertz**, Commerce City, Colorado

I am a low-wage worker at Walmart in Commerce City, Colorado. Having policies like family and medical leave insurance would relieve an incredible burden for workers like me who must take time from work to care for themselves or a sick relative. I believe that family comes first.

In 2014, I had an allergic reaction to the new shoes I had bought for work. As a result, I was not able to work for three weeks while my skin was healing from a horrible rash that caused blisters and scabs. This created such a financial burden for me that I got shut-off notices from the water and utility companies, had no money for groceries, and I wasn't even sure whether or not I would be able to pay the rent. If I had access to any kind of paid family and medical leave, I would not be faced with the possibility of being homeless because of an unforeseen illness.



***“[With paid leave] I could have eaten more than mac-n-cheese and fried egg sandwiches.”***

Wage replacement would have helped me cover enough expenses so that I could have eaten more than mac-n-cheese and fried egg sandwiches for an entire week. It occurred to me that maybe if I had money to eat, I would have healed faster because I would be eating more than one meal a day. A healthy body definitely helps faster healing.

Every year working families in the United States lose \$20.6 billion in wages due to a lack of access to paid family and medical leave.

Family and medical leave insurance policies would also answer the prayers of many of my coworkers.

It is no secret that finding a business that offers family-friendly benefits is a rare thing. Modest paid family and medical leave laws would give mothers

and fathers the ability to take care of their children and not have to abandon them when they're sick. It would give low-wage workers like myself the ability to heal without facing eviction or going hungry. I'm working with 9to5 Colorado and OUR Walmart to improve working conditions and family and medical leave policies.

***"I got shut-off notices from the water and utility companies, had no money for groceries, and I wasn't even sure whether or not I would be able to pay the rent."***



# *Caring For Yourself*

**Aimee Towne**, Morrisville, Vermont

When my daughter, Sophia, was born in 2012, I was able to piece together 12 weeks of leave, using all of my sick and vacation time. Shortly after giving birth, my husband, Pat, a self-employed concrete contractor, was injured and needed a hip replacement.



When I went for my postpartum visit to my doctor, I learned that I was pregnant again. With no paid time left for this second pregnancy or to care for my husband who was out of work, also without paid leave, my family and I were in a difficult position.

***“[With paid leave] we would have been able to focus on healing and the joy of welcoming a new baby, without relying on public assistance.”***

My second pregnancy was not easy. I developed preeclampsia and had to go on bed rest. My husband needed surgery at the same time. Both of us were out of work without any family or medical leave.

Our bills added up, making it extremely difficult to focus on our health. Xavier was born at just 34 weeks, and I took four weeks of leave, covered through an AFLAC policy, and an additional four weeks unpaid.

Parents who took leave report lower levels of public assistance in the year following their child's birth, when compared to those without paid leave.

Following his accident, my husband was out of work for almost six months. Our family qualified for fuel and food assistance, and while these services were helpful, they did not keep the lights on.

If we had had access to a comprehensive paid family and medical leave program, we would have been able to focus on our health, healing and the joy of welcoming a new baby, without relying on public assistance, and retain the dignity of providing for our own family.

The strain of financial hardships caused by unexpected injury – especially at the same time one's family is growing – can cause irreparable damage to a family. A paid family and medical leave insurance program, available to all workers, would ensure that other families do not experience what our family did.

***“The strain of financial hardships caused by unexpected injury – especially at the same time one's family is growing – can cause irreparable damage to a family.”***

# *Caring For Yourself*

**Carolynn Mascareñas**, Westminster, Colorado

I am a cancer survivor. I have always worked hard for an equal chance to advance and have a fair shot with safe and decent working conditions. In October 2009, I had a left breast mastectomy and had little chance to fight cancer because I was too busy fighting to keep my job.

Cancer is expensive! Not just from a financial point of view, but also from the emotional and physical toll that results. I took nine and a half weeks of FMLA during which I also used all of my accrued paid time off, which was only three weeks. There was no short-term or long-term disability available for me, and I could not afford to take any more unpaid time.



***"I had little chance to fight cancer because I was too busy fighting to keep my job."***

My work position is a relatively low-paying one, with a substantial part of my income coming from tips. During an eight-hour shift, my employer does not provide any breaks or meal period.

I am a sole provider with a home mortgage and all the normal household and personal expenses. I have worked multiple jobs for five years in order to build my savings. I used all of my savings to pay for out-of-pocket co-pays covering all of my medical, hospital, chemo and radiation bills. As a result, I was unable to have some badly needed major repairs completed on my 32-year-old house.

**Paid medical leave is critical to helping older workers stay in the labor force and maintain their economic security.**

A paid family and medical leave plan will go a long way in providing individuals such as me with a safety blanket of financial assistance while undergoing treatment for a debilitating medical condition such as cancer.

# *Caring For Yourself*

**Kayla Reid**, Griffin, Georgia

In 2008 I became a mother. The emotional and physical transition from “me” to “we” coupled with the excitement of finally having an “us” is a good reason a mother should be granted more time to adjust to such a life-changing event. Unfortunately, laws and regulations lag behind. Because I had a natural, vaginal birth, I was granted a maximum of six weeks of maternity leave with pay. However, the emotional and mental challenges I faced with the birth of my daughter forced me to take an additional two weeks. I did not plan on facing the horrible, unbalanced emotions of postpartum depression. At the time, I had too much on my plate to fully function at work. But the two extra weeks taken with no pay almost caused me to lose my job.



***“I did not plan on facing the horrible, unbalanced emotions of postpartum depression.”***

I am grateful for the FMLA but those two weeks off with no pay put me in a financial bind that forced me to work overtime, inevitably losing bonding time with my newborn. Being covered for 12 weeks is good, but when you are the one having the child and bringing home the bacon, no pay can lead you to the poor house.

No one should have to choose between their job and their family. Although I had help from family with my newborn, the financial burden was on me.

One in seven women experience postpartum depression. The majority receive no treatment.

***“The two extra weeks taken with no pay almost caused me to lose my job.”***



# *Caring For Yourself*

**Tammy Hall**, Springfield, Massachusetts

I'm a proud Personal Care Attendant and leader with 1199SEIU. About three years ago, I had major surgery that caused me to miss work and eventually lose my job due to the time I needed to heal and recover after the surgery. As a result of doing what the doctors ordered, I lost everything. I lost my home. I lost my car. And I could barely feed my family during that time.



Today, I am in need of another surgery. Due to my past experience, I am afraid to take time off from work because I will not have any income to take care of my responsibilities while out on medical leave.

***"I am afraid to take time off from work because I will not have any income to take care of my responsibilities while out on medical leave."***

If Massachusetts passes the paid family and medical leave law, I will be able to take care of my health and get the surgery I need.

Those needing but not taking leave are more likely to be female (64 percent), of color, unmarried, young and with kids.

***"As a result of doing what the doctors ordered, I lost everything."***

# *Caring For Yourself*

**Stephanie Tucker**, Collingdale, Pennsylvania

I work as a care manager for the aging. I make sure the elderly have services so they can stay in their own home. Last year, at the age of 47, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. My family has a history of cancer. My mother lost her battle with bone cancer at 57.

I felt the lump in January of 2017. At the time I was a temp and wasn't eligible for insurance, and made too much to qualify for state insurance.

In April, I was hired in an official position. That allowed me to have medical insurance but it didn't kick in right away. In October, I was able to schedule doctor's appointments and I got diagnosed Oct. 29. Deep down, I knew.

Even though I was now a permanent employee, I had not been there for a year, so I didn't qualify for any short-term disability. At the beginning, I used vacation and sick days, which quickly ran out. Towards the end I needed chemo each week instead of every other week. I just did what I had to do.



***There are days I'm still hurting or my skin is burning, but I would miss my pay, so I go in."***

A 2012 DOL survey showed millions of eligible workers each year put off treatment or go back to work too soon, mainly because they cannot afford unpaid time.

By the time I finished my chemo, I was close to my one-year anniversary. When I had my surgery, I was able to go on short-term disability, but it didn't pay until I was out for 30 days.

It's only 60% of pay and then taxes are taken out - you can't live on it. I had no vacation or paid sick days, which meant

going a month and a half without any income. I had exhausted all the programs which give financial support to cancer patients.

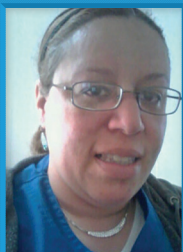
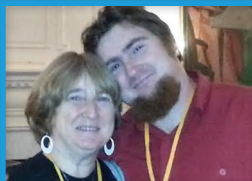
I went back to work in June and have been working throughout my radiation, which I have finally finished. There are days I don't feel well, I'm still hurting or my skin is burning. But even with FMLA protection for my job, I would miss my pay, so I go in.

It has been very difficult. You've got to cope with the fact that you have a diagnosis of cancer and make sure you can still pay the bills. You tell the car company you're going thru cancer treatment, and they still say, "When can you pay?"

We work hard. Why can't we heal just as hard? Why can't we put the same focus we put into our job into getting better? Everyone should have access to paid family and also medical leave.

***"You tell the car company you're going thru cancer treatment, and they still say, "When can you pay?"***

# *Caring For A Loved One*





# *Caring For A Loved One*

**Linda Nestler**, Ramah, Colorado

A few years ago, my father took a turn for the worse and his condition required heart surgery. The surgery was deemed a success, but it quickly became obvious that he had suffered catastrophic brain damage. Knowing his wishes in these circumstances, I arranged for him to be discharged under hospice care at home, with myself as his primary caregiver. Thus began our final journey together.



During this time, I had no income, as FMLA only protected my job. I cashed out my 401K in order to buy groceries and gas. I had to pay bills with my credit cards, and even sold all my jewelry and other valuables to try to make it through, but this was nothing compared to the pain of watching my dad fade away. This is what families do. They care for each other and support each other by any means necessary. Just as he held my hand as I took my first steps in this world, it was time for me to hold his hand as he took his first steps into the next.

***“My father lived just long enough for me to lose my job.”***

My father lived just long enough for me to lose my job. My family had to move to an RV because we could not afford the cost of rent and utilities. My daughter was forced to move in with friends so that she could continue to go to her local school, but has since had to move down to Texas to live with her sister. It took me another five months to get a job and get back to work.

For older adults, the presence of a family caregiver has been shown to delay or prevent use of more care-intensive health services like home health care and nursing homes.

In this economy, I still consider myself one of the lucky ones, but because of that time without a paycheck my bills are no longer manageable even now that I have an income. I couldn't get unemployment because my termination

was “voluntary.” I didn’t qualify for food stamps because of the income from the sale of the house, and because I didn’t have adequate food preparation facilities. Three months of paid leave would have made a huge difference but now bankruptcy looms.

For the price of two meals at McDonald’s a month, a fund can be set up and administered to assist people like me – people who are caring for a dying loved one, an ill child, a returning veteran.

***“My family had to move to an RV because we could not afford the cost of rent and utilities.”***

# *Caring For A Loved One*

**Staci J. Lowry**, Detroit, Michigan

In December 2014, my daughter, Bailee, had a stroke. She was four years old. At the time, I was going through a divorce and working for a large company.

I informed the company right away. A counselor at the hospital helped me send in all the forms for a leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act. This was my baby and I wasn't going to leave her side, but I also needed my job. It was hard enough that FMLA was unpaid. But because I hadn't returned to work in the beginning of 2015, the company wouldn't allow me to access any benefits that would have started that January, even though I'd worked there for nearly four years. In March they fired me. They made it seem as if I'd quit. The firing meant I wasn't eligible for unemployment insurance. I ended up cashing in my 401K just to survive. I lost my house to foreclosure. I'd been supporting myself and, later my three kids, since I was 17. After this, I had to move in with my mom and grandmother. I was in the middle of a cataclysmic meltdown.



***“This was my baby and I wasn’t going to leave her side, but I also needed my job.”***

After Bailee was out of the hospital, her routine involved seven doctors and three therapy sessions a week for speech, occupational and physical therapy. I couldn't find a job that worked with that schedule. So I wound up on public assistance. The firing ended my health insurance.

Nearly one quarter of adults in the US have been fired or threatened with job loss for taking time off to recover from illness or care for a sick loved one.

Had I had paid family leave, I would have accrued time that could have prevented me from being fired. I didn't mind going on assistance, but I do mind how that's become associated with being lazy and uneducated. Everybody at some point will need some financial help.

Paid family leave is key to having a sense of security. No one should have to make decisions like, “Do I put gas in the car or buy food for my kids?”

Bailee remains a constant source of inspiration. She’s a fighter, a very lively, curious little girl. Sometimes she likes purple and pink and tutus and fairies, but she can also wrap foil on her head and turn into a knight in shining armor. She’s so independent, wants to be able to do things on her own. To see my baby run – even with leg braces – that’s an awesome feeling.

And I have become an activist. I realized that all the people that make decisions based on me and my family’s needs have never had a conversation with me about how I feel. Someone sitting at the table in Lansing is making decisions about single Black mothers in Detroit, and that person is not single or Black or a mother. I’m working with Mothering Justice, because no worker should be left behind because of an unexpected problem at home.

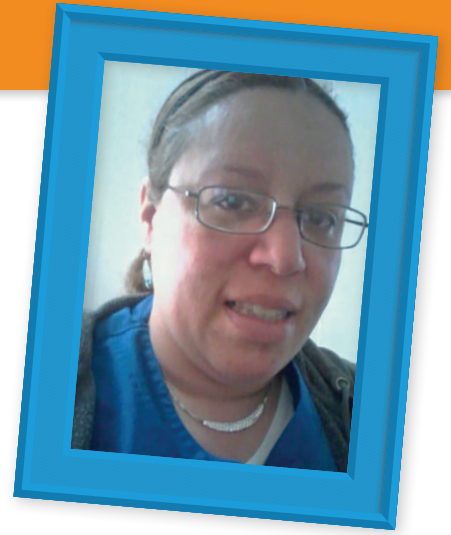
***“Had I had paid family leave, I would have accrued time that could have prevented me from being fired.”***



# *Caring For A Loved One*

**Dorcas,** New York City, New York

When my mother became ill, I had to use my vacation time to go and care for her. After two weeks, I had to return to work because I had exhausted my accrued time and couldn't afford to be out any longer. Although she still needed me and it was not what I wanted to do, I didn't have a choice and had to return to New York.



A few weeks later she became very ill. Once again, I had to make the choice to sacrifice my pay and return to Florida. My mom passed away on the same day I arrived. It was as if she was waiting for my arrival.

***“Even though I couldn't afford it, I wanted to be there for my mom.”***

Even though I couldn't afford it, I wanted to be there for her because she was always there for us when we were younger. It was fitting to honor her and say goodbye, by being there for her with my siblings and our families, but it still pains me that I wasn't able to be with my mom during her last days.

As a home health aide, we don't get paid that much. We live from paycheck to paycheck and when you live from paycheck to paycheck, you have no savings to draw upon when a family crisis arises. Taking any number of days off without pay is a challenge and means falling behind on bills. Over a year later, I still have been unable to catch up. As a home health care worker that takes care of elderly people for a living, I feel I should have been able to care for my own mom.

Low-income caregivers and Latino caregivers spend more than 40 percent of their income and Black caregivers spend more than one-third of their income on caregiving expenses.

Passing paid family leave insurance means that people like me would be able to care for their parents or other family members without enduring financial hardship.

# *Caring For A Loved One*

**Christine Lavault**, Fairhaven, Massachusetts

I am a widow who lost my wonderful husband to lung cancer. If I had paid family leave, I could have stayed at his side, giving him comfort and advocating for what he needed. He would not have had to suffer like that.

When he got so bad, I had to work. They wouldn't give me time off. Maybe I could have searched out more help for him. I will always regret not being there for him in his last days.



***“When families have a crisis, they should be able to take care of their loved ones without fearing loss of finances or their jobs.”***

My husband was a veteran of World War II and the Korean War and a retired maintenance worker at PACE. He was that type of sweet man that everyone loved.

When families have a crisis, they should be able to take care of their loved ones without fearing loss of finances or their jobs.

***“I will always regret not being there for him in his last days.”***

Currently, about 43.5 million Americans – nearly one-fifth of adults – provide care to adult family members or children.

# *Caring For A Loved One*

**Liz Halla-Mattingly**, New Britain, Connecticut

When I was pregnant in 2011, neither my husband nor I had any paid leave from work. In fact, neither of us was guaranteed unpaid leave under FMLA: His company had fewer than 50 employees and I was working several part-time jobs. He was only able to take two weeks of vacation time after our daughter was born, and I stayed home for almost 12 weeks without pay. It was stressful, especially after I was laid off from one of my three jobs during the pregnancy, but we made it work. We had done a lot of planning and we felt confident we could make ends meet until I was getting paid again.



***“We weren’t prepared for my mom to get diagnosed with cancer just three months after I returned to work.”***

However, we weren’t prepared for my mom to get diagnosed with cancer just three months after I returned to work. Even though I was working full time at this point, I hadn’t been working full time for an entire year, which is what is required to take unpaid leave under FMLA. Being unable to take any time off to help my mom through her treatment was incredibly stressful. This was not simply one moment in time, but something that consumed my family over several months and created a ripple effect into every aspect of our lives.

The Family and Medical Leave Act leaves out 40 percent of the workforce and guarantees only unpaid leave, which millions cannot afford to take.

I was so stressed out that within a week of my mom’s diagnosis my milk supply had drastically dropped. I was pumping at work and had to start supplementing with formula. I became more anxious about my ability to feed my daughter, and felt overwhelmed by the sudden loss of control over something I thought we had already figured out.

My mom was also my daughter's caregiver when I was at work, so once she started treatment I suddenly had to find new childcare. This created an added expense and even more stress and anxiety. When my daughter entered childcare, she started waking up more frequently at night.

With the thought of losing my own mom ever present in my mind, I could not see anything more important than being able to give my daughter love and attention when she needed it, no matter how inconvenient it was for me. Partly because I was breastfeeding, and partly because my husband was sometimes traveling for work, meeting this need fell almost exclusively on me and not my husband. For a few months, there were many nights I was only getting four or five hours of sleep, but in one- or two-hour increments, and then going to work exhausted.

Not having access to paid family leave meant I was forced to choose between meeting the needs of my infant or meeting my own needs, between being employed or helping to care for my mom. These are decisions no one should have to make.

***“Not having access to paid family leave meant I was forced to choose between meeting the needs of my infant or meeting my own needs, between being employed or helping to care for my mom.”***

# *Caring For A Loved One*

**Anne-Marie Pearson,** West Chester, Pennsylvania

Our lives changed forever when my sister, Joanne Van Newkirk, was unexpectedly diagnosed with terminal, late-stage gynecologic cancer. In a very short period of time, Joanne needed around-the-clock care. She was not married, nor did she have any children. This was the older sister who had helped raise the rest of us. Our father is deceased and our mother is elderly with medical conditions of her own. Taking care of Joanne and getting her safely to all her chemotherapy treatments and doctor visits became difficult. But this was a responsibility that I could not walk away from. This was family.



## ***“Siblings aren’t considered family under the FMLA.”***

I applied for family medical leave at my place of employment; however, I was denied since Joanne was a sibling and not considered family under the definition in the Family and Medical Leave Act. I appealed that decision, citing “in loco parentis” because of our family situation, however, it was denied once again. Having no other option, I made the difficult decision to resign my position of 17 years to help take care of my sister until she passed away.

I often think, “Who would have taken care of Joanne?” if I did not sacrifice my livelihood and my job? Today’s economy is not one in which anyone can afford to choose between taking care of a family member or keeping their job. Unfortunately, for many, this is a harsh reality.

**The average family caregiver who leaves the labor force to care for a loved one loses nearly \$304,000 in wages, Social Security and private pensions.**

No one single law should dictate who is considered “family.” With support from cancer groups and the Disability Rights Legal Center, I have been working for years to change Pennsylvania’s family leave law to expand the definition of family. The bill is named “Joanne’s Law.”



# *Caring For A Loved One*

**Blue Carreker**, Scotia, New York

A decade ago, I was out of town at a work-related conference, when I received two phone calls. The first call informed me that my mother, at 92 years, would require a second amputation, at which point the entire family recognized she might not survive. The second call informed me that my younger son, a senior in high school, had been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma – cancer. My mother died in August, almost at the same time my son completed his last chemotherapy treatment.



***“The fact that we could not be with my son during his cancer treatment was emotionally traumatic for all of us.”***

Neither his dad nor I had access to any paid leave, just accumulated sick time which we used up rapidly at doctor visits. We had an older son in college on top of our regular expenses. Thanks to the flexibility of my workplace, I was able to take extended lunch breaks to visit my son when he was in the hospital for chemotherapy treatments, and both his dad and I went to be with him every day after work. But for many, many hours and days, my high school son endured spinal injections and all the many side effects from his chemo treatment alone. We like to say that Rory became a man in those weeks; he found his self-confidence and began to monitor and direct the nursing staff to be sure he had his proper medications on time and received the medical attention he needed. But it also took a toll. The fact that we could not be with our son during his cancer treatment was emotionally traumatic for all of us.

**For seriously ill children, the presence of a parent can help reduce the duration of a hospital stay by nearly a third.**

Two years later, I was away at the same conference when I learned that my dad had been diagnosed with leukemia. He died in June. Just a few weeks later, as I was helping plan his memorial service, my partner of 28 years had a heart attack. He underwent triple bypass surgery and, two months later,

a stent operation. He took on the challenging task of advocating for himself in the hospital. My partner spent many difficult and painful hours alone as he recovered. I wanted to be there to help, but I no longer had any paid time available.

I know exactly what the writer Carol Abaya means by her term “The Club Sandwich Generation.” I am not sure how we made it through that period in our lives. We had good friends. We had adult siblings who helped. We had excellent health insurance and medical care. And I had an employer who allowed me to flex my time, telecommute, and to use sick and vacation time. What I did not have was paid family leave.

It is time that we wake up as a society to the fact that today’s workers are also caregivers who should not be forced to choose between economic security and the people we love. I am proud that we have now won paid family leave in New York. We need a national program that covers everyone for all kinds of care.

***“It is time that we wake up as a society to the fact that today’s workers are also caregivers who should not be forced to choose between economic security and the people we love.”***

# *Caring For A Loved One*

**Emily Yates-Pollard**, Portland, Oregon

In 2014, my wife and I welcomed our son into the world. I was fortunate; my employer offered 12 weeks of fully paid leave. My wife had none. Our son was born on a Thursday, so my wife took seven unpaid days off and then returned to work, leaving me home to fully recover from the birth and care for a newborn. It was hard for me to be home alone with a newborn and hard for her to be at work when I desperately needed her help, but we couldn't afford her losing her job or our family having a smaller paycheck. We had little outside support that was able to provide the help we needed.



***“We couldn't have the baby in our home state because at that time our marriage wasn't legal there.”***

My wife and I live 3,000 miles away from our family of origin. While it was a tough decision to have a baby while being so far away from them, we didn't feel it was an option to have a baby in our home state. At the time our son was born, our marriage was not legal there and my wife would not have been listed on his birth certificate. We had to choose between having additional support from his grandparents and having legal protections for our family.

**Family is the people in your life who want you in theirs.”**

**– Maya Angelou**

While we were far from our family of origin, we did – and do – have a family in Oregon. Our two best friends are very involved in our son's life and are the closest family ties he knows. They were both there soon after his birth and came regularly to help with anything they could. They made us dinner, folded our laundry, and held a sleeping

baby. Their support was irreplaceable during this time in our lives. But their ability to provide the respite that we needed as exhausted parents was limited. Since they are not related to us by blood or marriage, they were unable to take any leave to help us. These two people are closer to us and more involved in our family's life than our family of origin, but they do not qualify as our family based on limited government definitions.

While we are past the baby stage with our son, issues like medical concerns, emergencies, and other milestones for our family will continue to arise throughout our lives. My wife and I will navigate these issues, not just with our son and each other, but with our two best friends who are both single and child-free. They are our family and if they needed help or care, we would take care of them, no matter what. Our son will grow up with his moms and his aunties and will take care of them, too. Here's hoping he will be able to take the paid leave to take care of his loved ones that those who love him were denied.

***“These two people are closer to us and more involved in our family's life than our family of origin, but they do not qualify as our family based on limited government definitions.”***

# *Caring For A Loved One*

**K.V. Bapa Rao**, Los Angeles, California

I am a senior software developer who has lived in Los Angeles for over 30 years. In 2013, I had occasion to experience the blessings of paid family leave, after my mother suffered a fall in India. She fractured vertebrae and had other health complications resulting from the fall. As an only child, I had to drop everything and rush to India to be by her side and care for her during her recovery.



***“I would have been a psychological wreck if I had been unable to fulfill my obligations to my mother during this time.”***

I would have been a psychological wreck if I had been unable to fulfill my obligations to my mother during this time due to financial concerns of going without an income. Paid family leave is a boon to family health and peace of mind.

I feel very lucky to live in California where we have this benefit. The time has come to make this a national law for all US workers and their families.

When cared for by family members, hospital patients recover from illness and injury faster, leading to shorter hospital stays, improved health outcomes, and decreased health costs.



# *Caring For A Loved One*

**Kris Garcia**, Denver, Colorado

**F**or six years my father had been battling congestive heart failure and kidney failure, and was going to require surgery to increase his chances of survival. In 2009, I requested time from work to go down to Texas to take care of him, but I was only allowed to take four unpaid days. I made the trip and took my dad to the hospital, but before I knew it I had to board a bus for a 12-hour ride back to Colorado, back to my job, back to bills, and back to my 45-65 hour work week. I was forced to be at work, wondering the entire time how my dad's surgery was going, and if he was ok. As the week went by, my father was not getting any better and I was trying to make hard medical decisions over the phone instead of being next to him at the hospital discussing his options with the doctors. On top of the anguish of not being there when he needed me most, those four days of unpaid time had economic cosequences. I fell behind on my car payment and couldn't pay my light bill.



***“On top of the anguish of not being there when he needed me most, those unpaid days had economic cosequences.”***

Friday June 19th changed everything for me. I was at my job when I got the call at 4:00pm from his doctor telling me he wasn't going to make it. The doctor had to ask me over the phone if I wanted to take my father off life support. Devastation doesn't even begin to describe how that felt. As I sat waiting for my shift to end so I could go to Texas

and make his final arrangements, all I could think about was my father being alone as he took his final breath. No one was ever sent to relieve me at work, and I had to do my closing duties before I was allowed to leave. It was 10 pm before I could go home and pack. I would never wish that kind of suffering for any family.

**Losing even three days pay can amount to a household's monthly utility bill.**

That day was the turning point for me. I often wonder how many other people just like me and my family have been in that impossible situation. That's why I became a leader with 9to5.

Having Family and Medical Leave Insurance should be a right that all workers get, no matter where you work or live or who makes up your family. We all need to be able to be there for those we love.

***“All I could think about was my father being alone as he took his final breath”***

To find sources and links for the facts quoted in this booklet,  
go to [familyvaluesatwork.org/facts](http://familyvaluesatwork.org/facts)

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