



NEWS from U.S. Senator

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Senator Murray's Opening Remarks on the Family and Medical Leave Act

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing. The Family and Medical Leave Act is an issue that is vital to our working families. You're a great advocate for working families in the Senate, and I appreciate your efforts to get the discussion going about how we can build on the progress we've made so far.

As we celebrate the 15th anniversary of FMLA – and especially as we discuss some administrative changes proposed by the Department of Labor – it's important to understand the real value of this legislation.

FMLA provides more than job security during a time of personal or family illness. It gives people the peace of mind they need to be successful workers and caregivers. And when the working families of our country are more stable, so are our communities, our businesses, and our economy.

Fifteen years after the law's enactment – and despite dire predictions from businesses – our experience tells us that FMLA has worked for families and employers. We saw an economic boom in the 1990s. And workers still tell us how important it is not to have to choose between their jobs, and their health, or their families during hard times.

It's hard to put a price tag on that kind of value. But unfortunately, it appears the Administration is trying to do just that. I'm disappointed that once again, the Labor Department has taken a position that seems to be tipping the scales in favor of employers over workers and their families. And I'm concerned that some of its proposed administrative rule changes would impose unnecessary burdens on workers.

At a time when more and more working families depend on dual incomes – and as more people find themselves caring for aging parents in addition to children – family and medical leave should be expanded, not narrowed.

So I'm looking forward to hearing from Assistant Secretary Lipnic about the Department's proposal. I'm especially interested to hear the Administration's explanation of how the proposal protects workers' rights rather than restricting them.

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I believe FMLA was a great start in 1993. And I think we're ready to move to the next step. More needs to be done to help working families better balance their work and family obligations. Even though the ability to use family and medical leave is critical, not all workers are covered under the current law. And of course, no one is receiving paid leave.

Our government should be moving toward covering workers at smaller companies or those who work part-time and aren't eligible under the current law. As a society, I believe we need to move toward paid family and medical leave as a norm and not the exception.

I'm always disheartened to hear that our country stands alone among its industrial partners in not guaranteeing some form of paid leave to workers. It's my hope that in the near future that statistic will soon become a part of our nation's past.

Some of our states have already made strides in securing paid leave for workers. I'm proud to say that my home state of Washington recently passed a bill that will provide \$250 a week for five weeks to eligible workers who use their family leave when they become new parents. That's real progress I hope we can mirror at the federal level.

I was proud to co-sponsor your bill, Mr. Chairman, which would go even further, providing up to eight weeks of leave for workers who use family and medical leave. It's definitely another step in the right direction.

Working families need us to be their voice and make them our first priority. And that's why we're here today. So I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the value of family and medical leave to working families, businesses, and our communities.

Thank you.

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