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**Testimony Before the Interim Joint Committee on State Government in Support of Bill
Request 344**

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A Better Balance is a non-profit advocacy organization that uses the power of the law to advance justice for workers, so they can care for themselves and their loved ones without jeopardizing their economic security. We have years of experience and vast legal expertise working to craft and implement paid family and medical leave policies in states and cities across the country. Through our regional Southern Office, which serves states across the South, including Kentucky, we have heard from countless workers through our free and confidential legal helpline who lack access to paid family and medical leave and are faced with an impossible choice between caring for their loved ones and maintaining their economic security.

We write to express A Better Balance’s strong support for Bill Request 344, which provides Kentucky state government employees with twelve weeks of paid parental leave for the birth or adoption of a new child. We applaud Representative Jason Nemes and Representative Josie Raymond for championing this important issue.

Kentucky state employees do not currently have dedicated paid time off for parental leave. Federal law, the Family and Medical Leave Act, does allow some employees time off—12 weeks for a new child, but it is unpaid and leaves out many workers because they do not meet eligibility requirements since they have recently started working or only work part-time. This means that parents who give birth, even those recovering from major Cesarean-Section surgery or complications from birth, fathers needing time off to take care of a young infant, and parents who require time away from work in order to adopt their children, are forced to only rely on any existing paid time off they have been able to save up. Those families who have children close in age often use up saved time for a first birth and then have very little for time off for pregnancy complications or subsequent births.

Bill Request 344 would simply provide 12 weeks of paid parental leave at full pay for state employees who have been employed by the state for at least 12 months, to be used within the first 24 weeks after the verified birth or adoption of an employee’s child. Paid parental leave under Bill Request 344 would not include other forms of paid leave and employees would not be

required to exhaust their other forms of paid leave before accessing the benefit. Employees on paid parental leave will still be deemed state employees and be treated the same as other employees with respect to benefits and advancement.

Paid Parental Leave is Critical for Working Families, Especially During a Pandemic

Workers must be able to take the time they need to care for their loved ones without risking their financial security, especially during the unprecedented COVID-19 public health and economic crisis. Nationwide, just 22% of state government employees have access to paid family leave.¹ Low-wage workers and people of color, who are more likely to depend on every paycheck, are even less likely to have access to this critical protection.² According to a 2012 report, nearly one in four working mothers return to work within just two weeks of giving birth.³

When paid parental leave is not an option, Kentucky state employees who are expecting a new child are often forced to choose between coming to work sick, endangering the health of their coworkers, or using precious paid time off they were saving for when their child arrives. After the birth of their child, these workers often return to work without any remaining paid sick or vacation days in case they or their child become sick later on. This dilemma not only negatively impacts the health and well-being of the individual worker and their loved ones, but also poses a risk to the health of the larger community, because of the risk of spreading infectious diseases in the workplace. Providing paid parental leave will ensure that Kentucky's state employees can reserve their paid sick days for when they or a loved one truly need that time to seek medical care or recover at home.

In the wake of the current economic crisis affecting so many working families, where women and particularly women of color are bearing the brunt of the hardship, it is imperative that we support working parents who cannot afford to take unpaid time off from work. Without the protection of paid family leave, these parents often have no other choice but to sacrifice their paycheck or their family's savings due to complications from birth, needing to care for an infant born prematurely or with special needs, or when adequate daycare is not available.

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employee Benefits Survey: Mar. 2019, Table 31 (2019), <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2019/ownership/govt/table31a.pdf>.

² National Partnership for Women and Families, *Paid Family and Medical Leave: A Racial Justice Issue- and Opportunity*, (2018), p. 5, <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>

³ 1 in 4 American moms return to work within 2 weeks of giving birth — here's what it's like, Vox (Aug. 22, 2015), <https://www.vox.com/2015/8/21/9188343/maternity-leave-united-states>.

Providing Paid Parental Leave is a Smart Business Decision for the State

We understand that, given the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, state governments are faced with extremely difficult budget decisions. However, providing paid parental leave is a smart investment for Kentucky. In a 2018 survey of state and local government employers, 82% of respondents listed recruitment and retention of qualified personnel as a top priority workforce issue.⁴ Paid family leave has been shown to increase employee retention and lower turnover, which cuts down on rehiring and training costs.⁵

This is especially critical at a time when women in particular are leaving the workforce in huge numbers—nationally, 865,000 women left the workforce in September alone⁶—often due to a lack of support for family and caregiving needs. Economists are calling this a “she-cession.”⁷ For our economy to rebuild, we need to ensure that parents—and especially mothers—are able to thrive in the workplace. If they are forced out of the workforce when welcoming a new child to their family, then they will also face an uphill climb in reentry. Women who take paid leave after having a baby are more likely to be working 9 to 12 months after the birth than women who take no leave.⁸ In addition, new mothers who take paid leave are more likely to report wage increases in the year following the child’s birth.⁹

Paid family leave also helps boost productivity and improve employee morale. 91% of employers surveyed in one state reported that paid family leave had either a positive or neutral effect on profitability.¹⁰ A majority of employers in that state also reported positive or neutral effects on productivity (88.5%) and employee morale (98.6%).¹¹ Providing this benefit will also give the state a competitive edge in recruiting the state’s best and brightest employees, since many leading private sector employers provide generous paid family leave policies.

⁴ Center for State & Local Government Excellence, *Survey Findings, State and Local Government Workforce: 2018 Data and 10 Year Trends*, (May 2018), <https://www.gacities.com/GMASite/media/PDF/SLGE2018Workforce-1.pdf>.

⁵ Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman, *Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California*, (2011), p. 8, <http://cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>.

⁶ 865,000 Women Left the Workforce Last Month, Route Fifty (Oct. 6, 2020), <https://www.route-fifty.com/management/2020/10/865000-women-left-workforce-last-month/169045/>.

⁷ America’s Recovery from the 2020 “Shecession”: Building a Female Future of Childcare and Work, YWCA USA & Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin, (Oct. 2020), https://www.ywca.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID_WOMEN-CHILDCARE_R4.pdf.

⁸ Linda Houser & Thomas Vartanian, *Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public*, CENTER FOR WOMEN AND WORK (2012), p. 6-7, available at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/other/pay-matters.pdf>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman, *Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California*, (2011), p. 8, <http://cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

Kentucky's state departments likely already have experience shifting work around and covering assignments for new parents who are out on leave. It is often not necessary to hire a new employee to handle the workload of an employee who takes paid parental leave. Instead, their work can often be shared among others in a department to work within budgetary constraints. Studies from states with statewide paid family leave programs do not reflect abuse in those programs.¹² Moreover, data from those same states show that on average, workers take less than the maximum amount of time allowed by law, making clear that employees take only the time they truly need.¹³

Finally, paid parental leave allows workers to take the time they need to care for a new child without sacrificing their income or savings. By keeping workers with caregiving needs attached to the workforce, paid parental leave can help decrease reliance on public assistance and other government benefits, creating taxpayer savings. According to one study, both women and men who return to work after a paid leave are significantly less likely to receive public assistance in the year after the birth of their child than parents who return to work and take no leave at all.¹⁴

Paid Parental Leave Promotes Healthier Children and Families

Paid family leave is critical for promoting healthier children and families. Paid parental leave supports bonding with a new child during the critical first weeks after birth or adoption, and research shows that it increases the likelihood and duration of breastfeeding. The median duration of breastfeeding doubled for all new mothers who used one state's paid family leave program.¹⁵ Breastfeeding has lasting health benefits for babies and mothers, such as improved immune systems and digestion for babies and a decreased risk of various illnesses, both short-term and long-term, for mothers and babies.¹⁶ For new birth mothers, having 12 weeks of paid

¹² Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman, *Leaves that Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California*, <http://cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>; Sharon Lerner and Eileen Appelbaum, *Business As Usual: New Jersey Employers' Experiences with Family Leave Insurance (2014)*, Center for Economic and Policy Research, p. 23, <http://cepr.net/documents/nj-fli-2014-06.pdf>.

¹³ State Disability Insurance (SDI) Statistical Information, California Employment Development Department; Family Leave Insurance Workload in 2014 (2015), New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, p.1, http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/forms_pdfs/tdi/FLI%20Summary%20Report%20for%202014.pdf.

¹⁴ Linda Houser and Thomas P. Vartanian, "Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public, Rutgers Center for Women and Work (Jan. 2012), <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/other/pay-matters.pdf>.

¹⁵ Eileen Appelbaum and Ruth Milkman, *Leaves that Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences with Paid Family Leave in California*, <http://cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>.

¹⁶ Breastfeeding Recommendations and Benefits, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Last reviewed Nov. 4, 2019), <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/infantandtoddlernutrition/breastfeeding/recommendations-benefits.html>.

leave can help decrease symptoms of postpartum depression,¹⁷ and also allows for much-needed time to recover physically from childbirth.

Paid family leave also has significant health benefits for children. In a study of 141 countries, controlling for other factors, an increase of ten full-time-equivalent weeks of paid maternal leave reduced neonatal and infant mortality rates by 10% and the mortality rate of children younger than five by 9%.¹⁸ Children whose mothers do not return to work full time in the first 12 weeks are more likely to receive medical checkups and critical vaccinations.¹⁹ These health benefits are not limited to biological children. Children adopted as infants have the same health needs as other young babies, while adopted children of all ages also face specific needs while adjusting to a new home.

Providing paid leave for both parents allows new fathers to shoulder more of the caregiving responsibilities of caring for a new child. Fathers who take paternity leaves experience greater long-term engagement in their children's lives.²⁰ Research shows that greater paternal engagement has cognitive and developmental advantages for children.²¹ In addition, one study found that fathers who spend more time with their young infants experience fewer symptoms of paternal depression, and that "paid leave may also play a role in decreasing levels of paternal depressive symptoms."²²

A 2019 report by the Louisville Department of Public Health & Wellness praised the many health benefits of paid parental leave, stating, "family leave has significant benefits for the health of individual family members and for the well-being of the family overall. Paid maternity leave positively affects breastfeeding rates, infant mortality, vaccination rates, maternal health, and paternal caregiving. Paternity leave results in increased father-infant bonding, more equitable

¹⁷ Pinka Chatterji and Sara Makowitz, "Family Leave After Childbirth and the Mental Health of New Mothers," *The Journal of Mental Health Policy and Economics* 15, 61-76 (2012).

¹⁸ Jody Heymann, Amy Raub, and Alison Earle, *Creating and Using New Data Sources to Analyze the Relationship Between Social Policy and Global Health: The Case of Maternal Leave*, PUBLIC HEALTH REP. 126 (Suppl 3): 127–134 (2011) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3150137/>.

¹⁹ Lawrence M. Berger, Jennifer Lynn Hill, and Jane Waldfogel, "Maternity Leave, Early Maternal Employment and Child Health and Development in the US," *The Economic Journal* 115, no. 501 (2005).

²⁰ Maria del Carmen Huerta et al., *Fathers' Leave, Fathers' Involvement and Child Development Are They Related? Evidence from Four OECD Countries* (2013).

²¹ Ann Sarkadi et al., "Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: a systematic review of longitudinal studies," *Acta Paediatrica* 97: 153-158 (2008).

²² Olajide N Bamishigbin., Dawn K. Wilson, Demetrius A. Abshire, Cilia Mejia-Lancheros, & Christine Dunkel Schetter, *Father Involvement in Infant Parenting in an Ethnically Diverse Community Sample: Predicting Paternal Depressive Symptoms*, *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11: 157 (2020), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsy.2020.578688/full>.



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division of household labor, increased child-engagement, and improved health and development outcomes for children.”²³

Supporting the health of mothers and babies through a paid parental leave program can also help address the state’s alarming racial disparities in maternal and infant mortality. In Kentucky, Black women are more likely than white women to die during or after childbirth, and Black infants are more likely to lose their lives before their first birthdays than white infants.²⁴ One in four Black workers report that there was a time in the last two years when they needed or wanted to take leave for family or medical reasons but were unable to do so—more than twice the rate of white workers.²⁵ Providing access to paid parental leave can help bridge these racial gaps.

Conclusion

No one should have to sacrifice their economic security in order to care for a new child, especially during a global pandemic. By allowing workers to balance their caregiving needs while still earning an income, paid parental leave programs help protect public health and keep people working. Providing paid parental leave is also a smart investment for the state that will lead to increased retention and improved productivity and morale.

Kentucky now has the opportunity to join peer states such as Missouri, Arkansas, and Indiana in providing paid parental leave for state employees. We commend Representative Jason Nemes and Representative Josie Raymond for their support of this critical policy, and **we urge you to move forward with implementing paid parental leave for Kentucky state government employees.**

²³ *The Health and Socio-Economic Benefits of Paid Parental Leave and Louisville Benchmarks*, Louisville Department of Public Health & Wellness (2019),

https://louisvilleky.gov/sites/default/files/health_and_wellness/2019paidparentalleave_peer_cities.pdf.

²⁴ *America’s Health Rankings—Health of Women and Children in Kentucky*, United Health Foundation (2019), https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/health-of-women-and-children/measure/overall_mch/state/KY?edition-year=2019.

²⁵ Juliana Horowitz, Kim Parker, Nikki Graf, & Gretchen Livingston, *Americas Widely Support Paid Family and Medical Leave, but Differ Over Specific Policies*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER, pg. 54, <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/03/22152556/Paid-Leave-Report-3-17-17-FINAL.pdf> (March 23, 2017).