

April 21, 2021

House Committee on Ways and Means
1100 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Committee hearing on “In Their Own Words: Paid Leave, Child Care, and an Economy That Failed Women”

Chairman Neal, Ranking Member Brady, Members of the Committee,

We, the undersigned maternal and child health organizations, would like to thank the House Committee on Ways and Means for holding this hearing on paid family and medical leave, child care, and other issues of critical importance to working families, during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond. We strongly urge Congress to support a comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy to support optimal child development, improve maternal health, reduce disparities and enable future generations to live healthier lives.

Unlike in most other countries, in the U.S. parents are often unable to take time off from work to care for a new child, critically ill loved-one, or tend to their own medical needs without sacrificing the income they need to support their families. This has profound and lasting impacts on maternal and child health in the United States. Because pregnancy, childbirth and the transition to motherhood can be physically and psychologically demanding, women need time to care for themselves and their health. Paid leave is a critical tool to support healthier pregnancies, better birth outcomes, more successful breastfeeding and both physical and mental health in the postpartum period. Additionally, inclusive and comprehensive policies can reduce the inequities in access to paid leave, helping to bridge the racial and ethnic disparities in overall maternal and child health outcomes.

Beyond allowing for physical recovery after childbirth, paid time off from work is essential to providing a strong foundation for mom, baby and their family to thrive. Science tells us that babies’ brains are nourished by time spent with parents and caregivers. Policies that enable parents to spend time nurturing and caring for their babies—particularly in the early weeks after birth and for babies that are born pre-term, low birth weight or with illness—are critical to the healthy cognitive, social and emotional development of children.

The need for a comprehensive, equitable paid leave policy has taken on new salience in the past year, as many workers struggled to take time away from work to recover from COVID-19 or care for a sick loved one without risking their paycheck and their livelihood. The pandemic has drawn attention to and expanded preexisting disparities, creating both a health crisis and an economic crisis that has disproportionately impacted women, low-income families, and families of color. Now more than ever, it is clear: paid leave is a public health imperative.

It is time for Congress to act, and to provide all families with the comprehensive paid family and medical leave policy they need. We are grateful to Chairman Neal and the Committee on Ways and Means for holding this important hearing and we look forward to working with you to advance a comprehensive, national paid leave policy to meet the needs of American families.

Sincerely,
1,000 Days