

# FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACES

POLICY BRIEF



# PAID FAMILY LEAVE

The United States along with the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea and Tonga are the only countries that do not provide new mothers paid time off to spend with their newborn.<sup>1</sup> There is support for Paid Family Leave across party lines with 82% of Americans supporting paid maternity leave and 62% of Americans supporting a paid paternity leave.<sup>2</sup> A lack of paid family leave disproportionately impacts lower income individuals and those without a college degree. Approximately 66 percent of mothers without a college degree did not take paid family leave and half were let go or quit their job shortly after pregnancy.<sup>3,4</sup> Although some workers are protected by the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 and able to take unpaid leave, a study found that approximately 41 percent of United States workers were not covered under FMLA.<sup>5</sup>

In a study of the recent implementation of a statewide paid family leave program found that women were more likely to take a longer leave, typically 4 additional weeks.<sup>6,4</sup> They also found that mothers were more likely to maintain employment both leading up to birth and in the year following. In addition to supporting infants through paid maternal leave, coverage should be expanded to include paternal leave as well as adoptive parents.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Companies should provide a minimum of 12 weeks gender neutral paid family and medical leave. The policy should be comprehensive and include all aspects of care taking such as allowing leave for the birth, adoption, or fostering of a new child as well as time to care for those with serious illness whether that be a child, partner or parent etc.

# CHILD CARE

The cost and complications associated with child care place an enormous burden on Tennessee families, particularly those living in poverty. In Tennessee, 98% of parents to young children reported that these complications impacted their work productivity or career advancement.<sup>7</sup> The average cost of care in a Tennessee child care center for one infant is \$898 per month.<sup>8</sup> If a family needed to provide care for both an infant and toddler that cost would rise to \$1,731 per month.<sup>8</sup> Equivalent to 78% of the income for a family of four living in poverty in Tennessee.<sup>8</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Providing subsidized child care can lessen parental stress increasing worker productivity as well as supporting safe, stable and nurturing relationships with their child.
  - Employers can provide up to \$5,000 in child care subsidies each year without that amount being included in the employees taxable income.<sup>9</sup>
  - Employers that provide child care subsidies can claim between 10-25% of the cost (up to \$150,000) on their taxes each year.<sup>10</sup>



# BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT

Women with children are the fastest growing workforce in the United States. Businesses in Tennessee can improve infant health and support new mothers in the postpartum period by enacting policies that support breastfeeding. It is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics that mothers exclusively breastfeed their infants for the first six months yet, with less than 30 percent of infants being breastfed after 6 months, Tennessee ranks among the lowest in the nation.<sup>11</sup>

Breastfeeding decreases infections and illness in infants by boosting an infant's immune system. A stronger immune system results in decreases in medical care and time off from work for parents.<sup>12</sup> Mothers with formula-fed infants end up needing twice as many single day absences from work to care for a sick infant compared to those who are breastfed. In addition to improving health, family-friendly breastfeeding policies also save employers on average \$3 for every \$1 invested by reducing employee turnover.<sup>13</sup> Businesses with supportive policies for breastfeeding had an employee retention rate of 83-94 percent compared to a national average of 59 percent.<sup>14</sup>

By Tennessee law, all employers with more than 50 employees must daily unpaid break time for a mother to express breast milk. The employer should also make reasonable efforts to provide a room, other than a bathroom, where the employee could express milk near the work area.

## EMPLOYERS CAN FURTHER SUPPORT BREASTFEEDING MOTHERS BY:

- Ensuring the space is clean and private with a locking door and there are appropriate sanitary options such as a sink for washing hands and equipment.
- Providing a refrigerator or cooler space for milk.
- Creating a space where the mother can pump comfortably by ensuring there is an electrical outlet and a chair available.
- Training management on the importance of supporting mothers and lactation breaks.
- Creating a policy that is visible to all employees.
- Creating a workplace culture that encourages and supports new mothers to utilize these supports without fear of repercussion.

## SUPPORTIVE SCHEDULING

Supportive scheduling may look different depending upon the field of work each employee is in. Approximately one out of five members of the U.S. workforce do not work a standard 9 to 5 work day. That number increases to nearly half of workers in low-wage jobs. When possible, accommodating employee's by allowing them to work from home or work alternative hours can increase productivity, support child and family bonding, and decrease turn over.

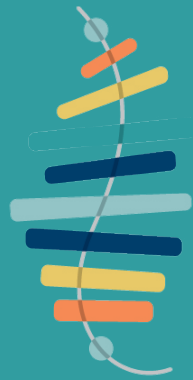
For positions such as restaurant, retail and service staff, where flexible workspaces and hours may not be a possibility providing a set predictable schedule can allow parents a peace of mind establish child care arrangements to ensure they are able to work their shift. Parents with less predictable work schedules are less likely to engage in health and development promoting behaviors with their children. Unpredictable work schedules, which are different than non-standard work schedules, can be especially disruptive to child development.

## IMPACT OF UNPREDICTABLE SCHEDULING ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT<sup>15</sup>

- Lower cognitive performance
- Lower rates of verbal comprehension and speech skills
- Increased irregular and negative moods
- Higher rates of obesity
- Disrupted meal routines
- Lower rates of nutrition
- Increased parental stress
- Less involved parenting
- Increased rates of parental depression

## References

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