

RE: RFI Response to the bipartisan, bicameral Congressional working group exploring solutions to expand access to paid leave for all Americans

January 31, 2024

Dear Senator Gillibrand, Senator Cassidy, Representative Bice, Representative Houlihan and members of the working group,

We are proud to submit a response to the Request for Information that was released by the bipartisan, bicameral Congressional working group exploring solutions to expand access to paid leave for all Americans. We commend you for convening this bicameral bipartisan working group. We are a group of private sector companies with a range of family leave policies who serve a predominant consumer base of parents. We are eager to share some of our learnings, including how private sector business can better support American families and some personal stories from those we serve. This is an opportunity for you, as leaders, to take action on this important issue.

Between us, we serve hundreds of thousands of American families, and we have witnessed firsthand – as many of us are parents ourselves – the dire need for federal paid leave. To say we are invested in this issue is to put it lightly. And we cannot overemphasize that the burden of solving this issue and carrying the financial responsibility should not solely rest on the shoulders of private sector companies. It must be a partnership between us and you, our lawmakers.

We all win when paid family leave is passed:

It Prevents Workforce Attrition: A staggering 30% of women exit the workforce within a year of welcoming a child without access to paid family leave. This alarming statistic is unacceptable and highlights the urgent need for comprehensive support.

It Fosters Collaboration Across Sectors: Solving for the fact that 73% of Americans lack access to paid leave through their workplace is a shared responsibility. One that requires a joint commitment across the private and public sector to truly make a difference.

It Creates National Equity: Only 14 states have a state paid leave policy. That leaves the majority of Americans without support, and navigating complicated legislation on their own. One federal leave policy will bring parity to all Americans and alleviate the burden on employers and employees alike.

In essence, we urge a collective approach, transcending industry boundaries, to ensure a robust support system for working parents.

We know that paid family leave is a pro-business policy. Research consistently shows that paid leave policies improve employee retention, productivity, and company morale – all drivers of a healthy, profitable business. At our companies, we note that since instituting our leave policies, we've seen positive benefits not only for the success of our business, but also in the personal satisfaction of the team. We have seen greater retention post-paid leave, an eagerness to contribute to the company's success when returning to work, and endorsement of our company as a great place to work through sentiment surveys.

Based on our lived experiences, we see a clear business and economic imperative for Congress to create one national paid leave program that will benefit businesses, workers, and our economy. Drawing inspiration from successful state initiatives that have served as examples for effective policies, we propose a refined approach at the federal level.

Our vision for federal paid family leave encompasses three key principles:

1. **Sustainable Funding:** We propose financing through payroll taxes contributed by both employers and employees.
2. **Alignment with State Programs:** We endorse existing state leave programs and emphasize the importance of a national policy harmonizing with them. This entails setting a minimum standard of 12 weeks of paid leave for federal paid leave.
3. **Inclusive Parental Eligibility:** We advocate for an expansive definition of eligible parents for bonding leave, encompassing birth, foster, adoptive parents, and parents of any gender. This ensures that two-parent households are granted two separate leaves during year one of parenting, fostering an equitable approach to child rearing.

Should it be beneficial, we are prepared to engage directly with Congressional leaders, highlighting the economic necessity of federal paid leave. Given the diverse constituencies that stand to benefit — parents, infants, and businesses — we encourage swift Congressional action. Your attention to this crucial matter is appreciated, and we implore you to take decisive steps toward the establishment of a national paid family and medical leave program.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record.

Signed,

BEAM
Bobbie
Carefully
Cerebelly
Chiyo
FreeWill

Lalo
Liquid Form Design
Nanit
Once Upon a Farm
On Purpose Leadership Coaching
Ritual
SimpliFed
The Company of Dads
Thimble Health
Tilt
Vivvi
Willow Innovations

Addendum A to the Submission: Companies

BEAM

BEAM is a media venture on a mission to change the narrative of motherhood, one shared experience at a time. We develop compelling content, build partnerships with brands and advocacy organizations, and hold storytelling events to center intersectional experiences of moms and caregivers and push for policy change. Our current leave policy is being crafted right now.

Bobbie

Bobbie is the mission-driven pediatric nutrition company that exists to build a parenting culture of confidence, not comparison. Founded in 2018, Bobbie set out to disrupt the infant formula industry while creating an entirely new workplace -- one that authentically supports working parents and allows them to thrive personally and professionally. Our paid leave policy provides 16 weeks of paid leave and up to one year of leave and job protection so that employees can do what's best for them and their families and return to work on their own terms, when they're truly ready to do so. This leave is equitable for all – applicable to both birthing and non-birthing parents and includes surrogacy and adoption.

Carefully

Carefully is an easy way to build a reliable, resilient network of parents you know and trust to share care and organize playdates, redefining the traditional 'care circle' model for the digital age. Carefully understands finding, organizing, and paying for childcare can be a challenge. We're connecting parents with their friends, families, and neighbors to make childcare more affordable and accessible to those communities who need it most. Carefully has no full time employees at the moment besides the founders, so we don't have a leave policy at the moment.

Cerebelly

Cerebelly is committed to providing life-changing superior nutrition for optimal cognitive development in children everywhere. We offer 16 weeks of maternity leave.

Chiyo

For the next generation of mothers looking for guidance on their ever-adapting health journey, Chiyo is a personalized & integrative food-as-medicine platform when they need it most. Unlike other maternal health companies, Chiyo does the research and the work of nutrition planning during fertility, pregnancy and postpartum, empowering women to feel their best with minimal effort.

FreeWill

We're a startup tech company that helps nonprofits fundraise. We offer a free online will and estate planning tool that allows users to donate a portion of their estate to the charity or charities of their choosing. In addition to making end of life planning accessible and affordable (free!) to the wider population and helping towards the equity in generational wealth, we've also helped raise over \$10 billion for high impact nonprofits since our founding in 2017.

We offer 12 weeks of fully paid parental leave to all of our team members (birthing and non birthing parents) for birth of a child, adoption, or placement of a child in foster care. In states that have state offered paid parental leave programs, we have to coordinate payments between the state and shore up the difference. It's time consuming and complicated to learn about each different states' leave and navigate through the parental leave process as a trained benefits administrator - it's even harder on our staff who are already going through a big life change. The more simple and streamlined it could be, the better. And although we are a small company, we have about 12 - 15 parental leaves per year so this adds up to a lot of administration.

Lalo

Lalo makes baby and toddler products that parents are proud to own. We support Lalo families by offering 12-weeks of paid parental leave for full-time employees who add a new member to their family.

Liquid Form Design

Liquid Form Design, helps build brands and is a solopreneur who had to raise money for my own paid leave when I had my son.

Nanit

Nanit is a high-growth baby tech company that is changing the way parents view their babies' wellness through the world's most advanced baby monitor and parenting products. At a minimum, employees who have been with the company for at least 6 months receive 12 weeks off fully paid for primary caregivers. Secondary caregivers receive 6 weeks off fully paid. We follow required statutory leave as required by state and federal law when filing. Additionally, dependent on the state, employees may be eligible for additional leave for bonding through their state's paid family leave program.

Once Upon A Farm

At Once Upon a Farm, Farm-Fresh Tastes Grow Here™. We're on a greater mission in providing organic, crave-worthy, snacks and meals for children of all ages. Our purpose as a parent's ally is to create systemic change in children's nutrition for a happier, healthier and more equitable planet. Delicious and thoughtful recipes are crafted with only the best organic ingredients – whole fruits and veggies picked, then cold-pressed (our pouches) or freshly frozen (our meals) to perfection – to support growing kids at every stage and milestone. All of our products are organic, non-GMO project verified, contain no added sugar, and are free from artificial flavors, colors and preservatives – just simple, real, nutritious food your entire family will love.

Birthing mothers receive 6 weeks of paid disability leave (to heal from the birth), followed by 12 weeks of paid parental leave (baby bonding). These two leaves can be taken consecutively or spread out over the first year of baby's birth for a total of 18 weeks. Non-birthing parents receive 12 weeks of paid parental leave. Our 12 weeks of paid parental leave applies to the birth or adoption of an employee's child or placement of a child with the employee in connection with foster care.

On Purpose Leadership Coaching

Business and leadership coaching for visionary, purpose-driven leaders who want to build world-class teams. Solopreneur building out leave policies.

Ritual

Ritual has set out to disrupt the supplements and prenatal vitamin industry through traceable science and sourcing. Ritual offers 20 weeks of paid family leave for all new parents, including primary and secondary caregivers of all genders who have become parents through birth, adoption or surrogacy. All Ritual employees have access to this benefit, regardless of how long they have been with the company and 100% of their salary will be paid. This is alongside an additional 4 weeks of Flex Time time for birthing parents, and a monthly child care stipend for all parents. We recognize the additional physical and mental health demands of birth, and offer Flex Time to help ease the transition back to work.

SimpliFed

SimpliFed is a virtual maternal health leader in breastfeeding and baby feeding support covered by health plans at no cost to families. SimpliFed offers 3 months of paid parental leave.

The Company of Dads

The Company of Dads is a media company, community platform and workplace educator focused on Lead Dads - those men who are the go-to parents whether they work full time, part time or devote all their time to their families, while supporting their spouse or partner in their career. Our goal is to help families fulfill their full potential.

Thimble Health

Thimble was founded to alleviate needle pain, but at our core, we are dedicated to creating a more empathetic and compassionate world of healthcare. A place where everyone has access to solutions that empower them to be fearless about their health. Thimble Health currently has one full-time employee and is building leave policies as they scale.

Tilt

Tilt makes navigating life moments easy with our technology and more human with our hearts. Tilt is a leave management platform that supports people when life happens. Tilt offers 4 months fully paid parental leave which includes a 4 week flexible return (100% pay, zero expectation of full-time work).

Vivvi

Vivvi provides child care and early learning for today's families, aligning the exceptional quality families deserve with the flexibility they need. We also partner with employers of all sizes to make full-time, part-time and backup care more accessible and affordable for working parents. Vivvi offers 12 weeks fully paid parental leave (adoptive & non-birth parents included).

Willow Innovations

Willow Innovations is a leading feeding brand that believes every mom deserves the chance to breastfeed the way they want - with clarity and confidence, and without compromise. We invented the world's first in-bra wearable breast pump to free moms from cords, tubes and bulky motor to give them ultimate pumping freedom. And, we continue to innovate to solve moms' most pressing feeding challenges.

At Willow, all parents have access to 16 weeks of paid parental leave, an additional six weeks of four-day transition workweeks at full pay, and extended bereavement time for parents who have experienced a miscarriage. To further support parents and all employees, Willow also offers unlimited PTO and work location flexibility.

Addendum B to the Submission: In Bobbie's Parents Push Harder Paid Leave Campaign, we sought to provide \$580, the minimum amount the Family Act would provide if passed, to 50 families. We received more than 10,000 applications in less than one month.

Below are 10 of those submissions

1.A.O., Oregon

I underwent a challenging maternity leave experience as I endured 12 hours of labor, eventually leading to an emergency C-section. Despite this, I was granted only a week of leave, which commenced on the day I entered the hospital. After spending four days in the hospital, my body wasn't prepared for a swift return to work, leading me to resign before any decision was made for me.

I did not return to work when I felt ready, facing numerous challenges, particularly financial ones. The lack of sufficient time to recover physically and emotionally posed significant hurdles. Had federal paid leave been in place, it would have been a lifeline for my family and many others in the U.S. The support would have eased the financial strain and allowed new parents the necessary time to recover and bond with their newborns without the added stress of returning to work prematurely.

As an expecting mom and mother to a 2-year-old, \$580 this month can significantly contribute to covering essential expenses for my growing family. This amount would help with prenatal care costs, baby supplies, and necessities for my 2-year-old. Additionally, it allows for a sense of financial security, easing the challenges that come with the responsibilities of motherhood and preparing for the arrival of a new family member.

2.C.S., Texas

I am a teacher in a suburb of Dallas, Texas. We are not given any paid days allocated specifically for maternity leave. We are required to use our sick days. I had accumulated enough sick days over the last 3 years to be out on maternity leave for 7 weeks, but did not want to use them all in case my son was sick at any point in the year, a family emergency occurred, etc. I returned to work after being home with him for 6 weeks.

I did not feel ready to go back to work. I was still experiencing bleeding and was continuing to recover physically after my delivery. I also did not feel like that amount of time was sufficient to bond with my son and develop the routines necessary for him to be on a consistent schedule.

One of the biggest challenges I faced when returning to work was maintaining my milk supply to continue breastfeeding my little boy. Prior to returning to school, I was pumping 3-4 ounces per pumping session. Once I went back to work, my supply began to decrease to the point that I was only pumping 1-2 ounces. A teacher's daily schedule is incredibly demanding and does not allow a new mother to pump every 2-3 hours as is necessary to maintain a sufficient supply. Because of this, I discontinued breastfeeding when my son was 3 months old. \$580 would benefit my family greatly this month. We receive hospital bills frequently since the birth of our son and these additional expenses have created a struggle financially. In addition, since I stopped breastfeeding we are spending a significant portion of our monthly budget to purchase formula. This \$580 would truly be a blessing to us!

3.J.L., Louisiana

I found out i was pregnant with my daughter at the time I was starting a new job. When i was getting situated with my leave i (at first) told that i could get time off, if i was employed for 6 months, then when i was time for me to take my leave, to have the baby i was told that i would not be covered because i was not working there for a certain time frame. But i was there well past the 6 months i was told i could get the paid leave. So i was not allowed any paid time off during the birth for my daughter.

I can definitely pay off a major credit card debt, as i am trying to get back in good status to buy a home.

4.S.G., Virginia

I am a teacher in Manassas Park City Schools. This is my first year working in this district and therefore I am not granted paid leave but have been allowed 6 weeks off. I am heartbroken and disappointed that this is my experience as a first time mom. I am set to return in March but am feeling extremely overwhelmed by my job already with sending lesson plans and doctors notes. There is no consideration whatsoever. :(

If I were to be awarded with this amount, I'd be able to pay my rent! This is essential as this is such a stressful time for me.

5.S.S., Mississippi

I was given 0 paid leave and had to take disability and use PTO and sick days for the 12 weeks of maternity leave. I went back to work and was completely unsupported by my team. I felt I was not ready to go back to work and my work team treated me completely differently afterward. Paid leave would have helped me tremendously with just feeling at ease about having to take time off without full pay to care of my child. My fears were confirmed about coming back to work after I was fired at the beginning of this and given no feedback on why.

\$580 would be a HUGE help to my family. Since losing my job and being the breadwinner of the family, we are struggling to figure out what to do in the meantime until I find another job. This money would go to help pay for my daughter's formula and baby food. She is 6 months and eating and growing like crazy!

6.A.D., Texas

I was shocked when I found out that the state of Texas isn't required to have maternity leave at jobs. My job unfortunately was one that did not have paid maternity leave which in turn means I had to use all of my vacation time plus sick time in order to use FMLA (unpaid). Luckily I have been at my job for a year and a half. I accrued about 4 weeks of PTO but will not get paid for 2 weeks. Because of the Medicaid I chose, I had to drop my insurance through my job. Not knowing about that, I had complications with my cervix and Medicaid will not cover the cost of the exams etc. I have to pay out of pocket for anything that does not pertain to pregnancy or my Medicaid. As a new parent, federal paid leave would help tremendously with having more time off that's paid for so that we (women) can truly recover the way that our bodies need/require to without the stress of having to return to work to make ends meet for our family.

\$580 would help my family to be able to afford more diapers, clothes since it's winter, a car payment, bills at home, food for my house. It would help me out with not having to find a baby sitter so that I could go and deliver orders (Door Dash, Favor) for money rather than spending time with my newborn and healing properly.

7.A.L., Arizona

My son came a month early so I was still not ready financially. We are both servers in restaurants so there's no way to work from home or anything like that. I have to show up and hustle to make money. My water broke at work! While my job was great at accommodating and supporting me through my whole journey, there was no paid leave. Well wishes don't pay my rent unfortunately. I stayed home to care for my son for almost my whole 12 weeks leave but returned when I ran out of my savings. I only work half of what I used to (by choice) so it's even harder now. In addition to the struggle of not being with him all the time, breastfeeding is hard to do while away and our supplemental formula is expensive and often sold out.

If I had paid federal leave, I would have been able to be more present at home and worry solely about taking care of my baby.

This money could restock our formula supply and help begin to pay our hospital bills.

8.S.S., Wisconsin

I worked at a Kroger store location during my pregnancy and throughout the time of my pregnancy while working, they were cutting my hours due to the company not having enough hours to go around so I went from full-time to part time in my pregnancy continued I became severely anemic so at eight months and two weeks I had to go on leave, and after numerous phone calls to the managers, no one got back to me about the proper protocols and procedures for going on an official leave and I ended up being terminated.

I am a 20-year-old woman with a one month old \$580 would help me and my new baby and family tremendously. I'm currently having car troubles and I am currently not receiving any income due to my job terminating me because I was no longer able to work due to symptoms for my pregnancy.. This would help me find another job to help support myself and my baby In the meantime, this would also reduce the stress of daily purchases, needed to care for my child, such as diapers, wipes, clothes, blankets, and things of that nature. because I did not have a baby shower or any support. I would really use the money for daily necessities, and I would be really grateful.

9.A.M, Michigan

I'm currently a week and a half postpartum. I was fired from my job (daycare worker) at 7 months pregnant for getting sick with my first child and oversleeping. I made a one time mistake of not calling out. I had a repeat c-section and am not nearly ready to go back to work, even though my family needs it. I would not have received any paid leave regardless because my job didn't offer it. If I had a job with paid leave I certainly would have fought harder to maintain it. I was only getting paid \$11 per hour, though, so pay would have been very minimal. Paid leave with a second child would've greatly helped financially, especially since my husband didn't receive paid leave, and he only was able to take off 7 days. We just moved to a new state at 4 months pregnant and tried starting over- yet we wouldn't qualify for paid leave regardless. Some piece of mind that our bills would be taken care of for a couple months, and we don't need to worry so much about diaper/wipe/clothes money would alleviate a huge burden.

That money would help pay for bills, diapers, wipes, and more baby clothes. We live paycheck to paycheck and just having extra income, since I can't work right now, would be the biggest help! That money could help us make sure our kids are taken care of- fed, clothed- and rent is able to be paid on time.

10.T.G.T., Nevada

Hello I had to start looking for new work to support my new family of 5 myself and my 4 sons no I wasn't ready at all. Baby son was born with challenges as well as when I gave birth to him my uterus ruptured and they couldn't stop the bleeding during my C-section so I laid on that operating table for about 4 hours feeling people moving organs in my body to the doctors saying sorry Temple we can't save your uterus we have to take it in order to stop the bleeding I had to receive blood transfusions I spent a 7days in that hospital and they're was no time for recovery because I had to support my child while I left my youngest son in the NICU and had to figure out work home left with 3 sons and NICU life as well as working for the next coming months while still trying to heal physically and mentally through the trauma of what happened during the birth of my awesome son I wouldn't change for the world. Federal paid leave would've have relieved some weight and worry I was carrying on how rent and bills would be paid and let me enjoy the newborn stage with my last and final baby and full process what I went through and happened all together. Thank you.

It can help me pay a couple bills and get my medically complex child some supplies that's needed as well as get me to and from work since I catch public transportation to work overnights at my job.