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NJ TIME TO CARE COALITION JOINS IN CELEBRATIONS OF FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

And Applauds New Jersey's Family Leave Insurance Program, Providing New Jersey's Working Families with Expanded Access to Affordable Leave

February 5 marks the 20-year anniversary of President Clinton's signing of the historic Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the first federal law that guaranteed Americans protected time to care for loved ones. Since its implementation in 1993, FMLA leave has been used more than [100 million times](#) by an estimated [35 million](#) men and women, helping a generation of children get a healthy start in life, a generation of seniors age with greater peace of mind, and many adults care for family without having to sacrifice their jobs or health insurance.

FMLA offers 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave, which workers can use to care for a new baby, a sick family member, or to recover from an illness. To be protected by FMLA, a worker must be employed by a company with 50 or more employees and work 1,250 hours per year and be on the job for at least a year.

Yet, these provisions leave out more than half of the workforce by excluding workers in smaller companies and many part-timers; it also has a narrow definition of family that does not include domestic partners or siblings and does not cover routine illnesses. In addition, [several million workers](#) a year who are eligible for FMLA and need leave don't take it – mostly because they cannot afford to go without pay.

New Jersey is one of only two states that has worked proactively to bridge that gap by adopting a **Family Leave Insurance program** (FLI), providing wage replacement to workers who need time to bond with a new child or care for a seriously ill family member. This strong step forward has helped workers afford to take the unpaid leave they are guaranteed under FMLA. Recent research by Rutgers Center for Women and Work (CWW) shows that FLI has been an enormous success with over 3 and half million workers covered by the program, and over 100,000 claims approved since the program's implementation – 80% to provide time to bond with a newborn or newly adopted child and the remaining fifth for care for a seriously ill family member. The CWW report, [Policy in Action: New Jersey's Family Leave Insurance Program at Age Three](#), highlights the contrast between the high levels of need for and favorability toward FLI and the limited awareness and use of the program, and makes recommendations for program improvements to reach more working families.

"Workers commonly experience events for which they need leave but link decisions not to take leave to concerns about affordability; often these same workers do not know they have an option for paid leave," said Linda Houser, co-author of the report, Affiliate Fellow of the Center for Women and Work, and Assistant Professor at Widener University.

Today's FMLA anniversary kicks off a month of activity in Congress, starting with a press conference organized by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi to discuss expanding work-family policies, and renewed momentum behind expanding the protections of FMLA at the federal level. Members and allies of the NJ Time to Care Coalition are participating in these activities, including Herb Greenberg, President and CEO of Princeton-based Caliper Corporation, who has seen the benefits of FLI program for his workers and his business.

"I'll tell you a secret: If people would only open themselves and realize it, it's just as important for business as it is for labor," Greenberg said. "It's a win-win situation."

To spur federal policies, workers and activists from across the country are filling the gaps in FMLA through local campaigns to advance policies like paid sick days and family and medical leave insurance. These policies boost the economy by helping workers keep their families afloat during a serious illness or a birth, and by protecting Americans' jobs and paychecks when they need to take off a day to care for a sick child or recover from the flu.

"As states consider family leave insurance programs, New Jersey's experience clearly demonstrates that it is possible to put in place a strong paid leave option that benefits families," said Karen White, co-author of the report and Director of the Working Families Program at the Center for Women and Work. "The recommendations for policy changes in this report to improve the program in New Jersey can also serve as a guide to other states."

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[New Jersey Time to Care Coalition](#) is a group of over 80 organizations working for family-friendly workplace practices. Everyone benefits when workers are able to balance job obligations and family needs. Paid "time to care" means strong families, strong workplaces, and strong communities.

Read the personal stories of working people [in New Jersey](#) who have benefitted from FLI and [across the country](#) who have benefitted from FMLA, or suffered due to the lack of protection.

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