



New Paid Family Leave Bill Unveiled

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By Scott Goldstein

A new family leave proposal to give workers partially paid time off to care for newborns and sick family members will soon be considered by the state Legislature, Sen. Stephen Sweeney (D-Gloucester) announced today. Unlike last session's family leave legislation that failed to get a vote on the Senate or Assembly floors, the new bill (S-786) was changed to make it more politically palatable – limiting workers to six weeks off instead of 10.

"Employers still won't have to spend a dime to support the fund that would pay for the leave time," said Sweeney, who is sponsoring the bill. "This will be a worker-funded system that will be scaled back, but still worth the effort."

Backing paid family leave is Gov. Jon Corzine, Senate President Richard Codey (D-Essex) and Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts (D-Camden). Also supporting it is a powerful coalition that includes labor unions, pro-family groups and AARP, formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons.

Like last session's bill, public and private workers who use the leave would receive two-thirds pay up to a maximum of \$502 per week. Workers would have to exhaust their vacation time before drawing on paid family leave. Further, companies with fewer than 50 workers would not have to hold open jobs for those taking the leave.

Workers would fund the program through a payroll deduction of about \$1 a week. The money would go into the existing state Temporary Disability Insurance Fund.

But business lobbyists are opposing it, saying companies cannot afford to lose key workers for up to six weeks at a time and pay for temporary replacements.

Employers are currently required to grant as much as 12 weeks of unpaid family leave, and companies with fewer than 50 employees are exempt.

California currently offers six weeks of paid leave at 55 percent of the worker's pay with a cap of \$840 per week. The state of Washington recently adopted a program that offers five weeks of paid leave up to a maximum of \$250 per week. New York and Massachusetts are also considering bills mandating paid family leave.

"I'm confident that this proposal will still give families of working New Jerseyans the comfort and time they need to deal with crises without disarming small businesses of the support they need to thrive," Sweeney said.

The New Jersey Chamber of Commerce said it expects the bill to get a hearing on Jan. 28 by the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

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