



# Paid Family Leave Measure Necessary In State

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By ANTHONY DEPRINCE III  
For the *Courier-Post*

I agree that New Jersey needs serious reforms in the area of taxes, economic development and the like in order to make the state more tolerable for its residents and businesses. However, grouping these issues into the same debate with the need and benefits of paid family leave is unfair and ridiculous. Far behind

What does it say about a country that lays claim to be a humanitarian and civilized nation that ignores the basic needs of its own families in times of tragedy or of a child's need for a proper upbringing? The United States and Australia are the only industrialized nations in the world without a guaranteed paid family-leave benefit for its citizens.

Even many lesser developed countries have prioritized child-rearing and caring for sick loved ones as something that is important enough to guarantee it to their citizens. In one research report, the United States is one of only five countries of 168 studied that doesn't mandate some form of paid maternal leave, putting us on par with Papua New Guinea, Lesotho and Swaziland.

Today's obvious economic realities have necessitated, in many cases, that both parents generate income to sustain their family's needs. In fact, in 61 percent of families in America, both parents work.

When it comes time to rear your baby in the early stages of life or when a husband, wife, child or parent becomes seriously ill, you should not have to choose between bankruptcy or your family's emergent needs. Strong foundations

It has been concluded time and again that the backbone of any culture and society is strong families. Strong foundations at home, parental support and many other factors are key to a child's success socially, medically, developmentally, academically and morally.

Generally, countries with paid parental leave have lower infant mortality rates. In 2003, the United States, which doesn't have paid family leave, tied for 38th place with Estonia, Poland, Slovakia and the United Arab Emirates in infant mortality rates. In 1993, when President Clinton

signed the Family Medical Leave Act (F.M.L.A.) into law, it was a good start. However, it does not guarantee pay, it only preserves one's job through family leave.

This, like many benefits, falls short for our most needy families in the country and state. Those of us in the middle, working class and those who are even less fortunate, still have to make a very difficult economic choice when taking advantage of current federal family leave entitlements. This often results in only one choice – family economic survival – regardless of the necessity or need for true family leave. Minimizes risks

There are many who fear such benefits are anti-business or that such an entitlement will be abused. It is difficult to argue that paid family leave would not affect employers or be abused by some employees. However, I believe it is clear the bill, as it is currently proposed in the state Senate and Assembly, does its best to minimize these risks in particular to the already fragile small-business community.

Funding this program through employee contributions to current temporary disability insurance premiums, keeping the benefit to 10 weeks, excluding employers with less than 50 employees and other provisions also assist in minimizing the financial impact to the business community.

The issue really needs to be focused on what it is about and who would benefit – families. Too often, we forget that our integrity, and ultimately, our nation's future is based on the support and attention we give to children and families. A balance needs to occur between work and family and the paid family leave bill in front of our state Legislature creates the balance we desperately need.

*The writer lives in Magnolia and is a borough councilman.*

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