



## Paid leave deserves to pass

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It's hard to understand the hostile reaction of the business community to the idea of allowing a worker time off to care for an infant or a seriously ill child or a parent coping with the medical conditions that accompany advanced age. Such opposition is especially tough to comprehend because companies wouldn't have to pay a dime.

Still, businesses are issuing the usual dire warnings that such a change in workplace rules could threaten thousands of New Jersey firms. In decades past, companies made a similar forecast about the impact of the 40-hour workweek, and predictions of doom pop up every time there's talk of raising the minimum wage.

We supported the paid family leave idea when lawmakers and business lobbyists went head to head on the issue last year. Unfortunately, that legislative session ended before a vote was taken.

The proposal has been revised, with backers making changes to meet some objections raised by businesses. Originally, the bill called for giving a worker 12 weeks of leave. That was reduced to 10 weeks and finally to six. Still, companies oppose the measure. We doubt that any further tinkering would appease opponents.

The bill contains safeguards to prevent abuse. Under the current version, an employee would have to use as much as two weeks of vacation before being able to take up to six weeks of leave. The worker would receive only two-thirds of his salary, up to a maximum of \$502 a week. The money would come from a state fund that would be financed through payroll deductions averaging less than \$1 a week. Companies would contribute nothing.

Small businesses, those with fewer than 50 workers, would not have to hold a job open for an employee on leave, but larger firms would have to keep a position available, although not necessarily the one the employee had.

Opponents complain that small operations -- offices or stores with just a handful of employees -- could be crippled if even one worker took the leave. Maybe, but realistically, most employers try to accommodate the needs of valued employees whether the law requires it or not. They make adjustments to help a worker get through a particularly tough personal period. The legislation is aimed at those very few who aren't so understanding. Supporters estimate that because of the reduced pay, only 1 percent of employees would take advantage of time off.

The paid leave bill is designed to permit families to deal with emergencies for a short time without worrying about a paycheck. What's wrong about that?