




VOICES OF MAIN STREET
 Paid Family & Medical Leave Stories from
 Small Business Owners
 SUMMER 2019





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At some point, nearly everyone needs time away from work to recover from a serious illness or care for a sick loved one or new child. Yet only 17 percent of the U.S. workforce have paid family leave through their employers and less than 40 percent have personal medical leave through an employer-provided temporary disability program.¹ Unequal access to paid leave reflects structural inequality, with lower-paid employees² and employees of color less likely to have access.³ Lack of paid leave forces working people to make the impossible choice between their paychecks and their families. With women still shouldering a larger share of family caregiving responsibilities, the lack of widely available paid leave, exacerbates gender inequalities.

For Main Street businesses, healthy families are part of our bottom line. There's more to life than work. Small business owners and our employees alike all need to take time away from work when a loved one is sick, or we have health problems of our own. That's a real financial struggle for all of us – and it shouldn't be.

From coast to coast, 30 million small businesses employ 58 million people;⁴ small businesses lack the capital and the scale to provide earned benefits like paid family and medical leave (this includes 85 percent of businesses surveyed by Main Street Alliance), even when business owners want to provide those benefits.⁵ This results in many small businesses losing talented employees to large corporations, which wield the market power to give good benefits to top managers but are squeezing everyone else with low-wage, uncertain jobs. Small businesses benefit when employees can care for their families – and return to work ready to help small businesses profit and thrive. Main Street businesses

don't want to lose good employees; turnover and instability is costly. To give small business a fighting chance, we need to level the playing field and adopt a strong paid family and medical leave program.

Progress has already been made. States and municipalities across the country – California, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York, Hawaii, Washington state, Massachusetts, and Washington, DC – are showing these laws help create a more equitable Main Street and small businesses report an overall positive experience with these programs. Paid family and medical leave laws make paid leave affordable and accessible to small businesses, both leveling the playing field between small businesses and large corporations and increasing economic security for small business owners and their employees.

When lawmakers fail to act, large corporations win. Leaving small business owners and employees to fend for ourselves, giving big corporations that already dominate our economy and politics a competitive edge. Small business owners and our employees need action from lawmakers to address racial, geographic and gender inequities across the country. The United States has vast racial and gender wealth gaps produced by decades of discriminatory policy, making paid family and medical leave especially urgent for families of color and women.⁶ The country's rural people and people of color are less likely to hold jobs where paid leave is offered, and women more often shoulder caregiving responsibilities. A federal paid leave program will increase workforce participation of women and people of color, creating more stable households and a stronger, more equitable economy.

1. <https://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/benefits/2018/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2018.pdf>

2. <http://cepr.net/documents/nj-fli-2014-06.pdf>

3. <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>

4. <https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/advocacy/2018-Small-Business-Profiles-US.pdf>

5. https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/mainstreetalliance/pages/716/attachments/original/1518636864/MSA_PFML_Report_-_Phase_1_v3.pdf?1518636864

6. <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/paid-leave/paid-family-and-medical-leave-racial-justice-issue-and-opportunity.pdf>

A Win-Win-Win: Good for business, employees and the economy

Paid family and medical leave is good for small businesses, employees and our communities. A national paid family and medical leave law would:

Allow small businesses to offer and access a benefit that is currently out of reach.

Enabling all employees and businesses to contribute to an insurance fund uses the power of numbers to make paid leave affordable for even the smallest businesses. Replacing a full-time employee who makes \$15/hour for 12 weeks would cost about \$5,000 in wage replacement. By comparison, an employer would contribute about \$100 to the fund for the employee each year. In turn, employers will be able to use the wages of the employee on leave to increase hours of other employees, hire a temporary replacement, invest in their business, or save for another use.

Help small businesses attract and retain great employees.

A universal paid leave program will help level the playing field between small businesses and large corporations. Currently, large corporations and other high-revenue businesses wield the market power to offer paid leave to their employees. That gives them an advantage in attracting and retaining employees. Ensuring paid leave is widely available will help small businesses become employers of choice in our communities.

Increase productivity and reduce employee turnover, helping businesses with their bottom line.

Employees who can take time away from work and still receive enough income to pay their bills are much more likely to return when the period of leave ends. Employees who have access to paid leave report higher job satisfaction and loyalty, factors that increase productivity. Productive employees reduce costs and increase revenue, helping businesses grow and thrive.



See Christie Bateman's story on page 16

Leaving businesses like mine to put these policies together on our own, piecemeal, is costly and unproductive. We need a collective solution, one that accounts for small businesses and our employees.

BUSINESS CASE FOR PAID FAMILY & MEDICAL LEAVE

Provide critical financial security for small business owners themselves.

Small business owners themselves need paid family and medical leave. They, too, have new babies and ailing partners or parents, and often cannot afford to take unpaid leave. Their cushion may be razor thin, and a single accident or a medical emergency could jeopardize the health of a small business and throw a business owner into financial ruin. Under a national paid family and medical leave social insurance program, small business owners would have a guaranteed revenue source while out on leave allowing them to take care of themselves and their family without risking their business.

Increase equity.

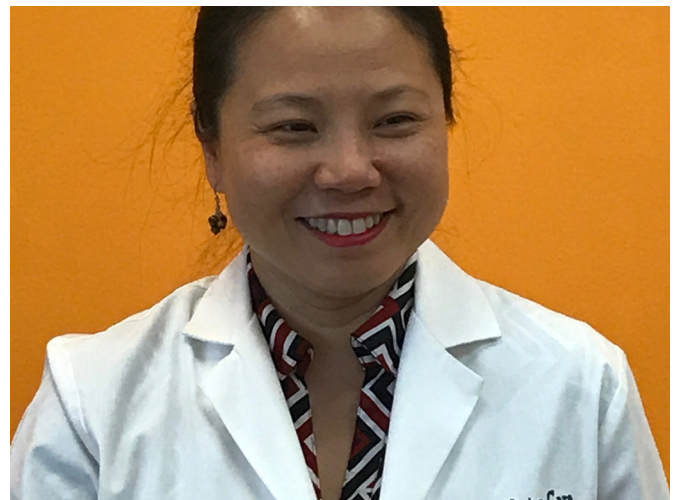
Women and people of color are disproportionately affected by the lack of universal paid leave. People of color are less likely to hold jobs where paid leave is offered, and women more often shoulder caregiving responsibilities. A national paid leave program will improve the workplace for women and people of color, creating more stable households and a stronger more equitable economy.

Support local economies.

Americans lose close to \$20.6 billion annually in wages due to a lack of access to paid family and medical leave.⁷ People who take unpaid or partially paid leave reported putting off spending, resulting in hardship for families and lost income to small businesses. Business owners cite weak sales as the biggest problem for their business and the economy, and ensuring that employees have consistent wages means that consumer demand won't go lax with each illness or family event or emergency. Further, if the United States were to adopt family friendly policies seen in other advanced countries, it is estimated that the women's labor force participation would rise yielding as much as \$500 billion in greater economic activity.

We cannot continue allowing big corporations to set all the terms. Small businesses deserve to thrive, and everyone working in the U.S. deserves to take time to care for family and feel secure in their day-to-day lives. Let's leave no business or family out. Families and small businesses alike come in all shapes and sizes. We need a paid family and medical leave program that includes all entrepreneurs, all workers, and all families. Here are some of the voices of Main Street.

Paying a little bit over time for the insurance benefit just makes sense. Then, when I or when one of my employees need to take leave, the support is there. This is affordable for small business. What is not affordable is to have to pay for leave all at once.



See Dr. Thuy Tran's story on page 19

7. <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/22060013/CostOfWorkFamilyPolicyInaction-report.pdf>



I've run a logistics company, a retail shop, and have turned a single popcorn store into a franchise in five states. I've learned a lot as a business owner over the years, but across industries, there's one thing in common: consumer demand drives my business decisions and my business growth. **Workers who take unpaid leave when medical or family caregiving needs arise report putting off spending, which means not just hardship for families, but also lost income to small businesses like mine.**

For some people, that means choosing between putting food on the table or keeping the heating on during cold Iowa winters. For others, it will mean fewer dinners out and fewer extras like gourmet popcorn. If people can't afford basic living expenses, they definitely won't be buying any popcorn from my stores. The FAMILY Act would help create the vibrant local economies small businesses need to survive.

Consumer demand drives my business decisions and my business growth... If people can't afford basic living expenses, they definitely won't be buying any popcorn from my stores. The FAMILY Act would help create the vibrant local economies small businesses need to survive.

I know first-hand the difference having access to paid family and medical leave can make.

When my first daughter came home and I was working at a job with paid leave benefits, I was able to be home with her for three months, and my husband was able to take six weeks off as well, thanks to the benefits I had at work.

As first-time parents it was wonderful to have that time to bond with her. By the time my second daughter arrived, our Design + Build company had grown so that we were both full-time in our start-up. We looked into purchasing short-term disability insurance—but for a high risk industry like ours the costs were astronomical. With high premiums, exclusions and low benefits, the private insurance costs far outweighed the benefit and we made the hard decision to go without this coverage.

This time, with a new business and no paid leave, I was back at work a few days after my second daughter was born—juggling caring for her and our growing workload. For our overall mental health and stress levels, it would have been a huge relief to have something in place for paid leave.

That's why I support the paid family and medical leave social insurance program. It levels the playing field between big and small business and it just makes common sense for a society that cares about

Paid Family and Medical Leave levels the playing field between big and small business and it just makes common sense for a society that cares about family.

family. In the construction trade we work with many sub-contractors with small or one-person shops. They are in the same boat needing a program like this. We work with one person whose mother-in-law just had a stroke and his father-in-law has dementia and another contractor who took a huge financial hit to take the time he needed to care for his father's health. We need a national paid family and medical insurance program that covers all businesses, regardless of size, and all individuals, whether they are employees that work part-time, full-time, individuals who are self-employed, or are independent contractors, or are business owners themselves.



Emily Ingwersen is the co-owner of Ginger Hill Design + Build, a premier green building firm in Maine

SPOTLIGHT: Karen Lamy DeSousa—Advance Air & Heat—East Freetown, Massachusetts

If it's good enough for Massachusetts, why can't it work across the United States? People should be able to take paid time away from work to welcome a new child, care for a sick loved one, or recover from an illness of their own. Thanks to the laws we've passed here in the Commonwealth, working people can soon do all those things. **In 2018, Massachusetts passed legislation that guarantees access to paid family and medical leave beginning in 2021.**

However, the rest of America may not be as lucky. There has been a lot of talk about different proposals, from universal paid family and medical leave insurance to a restrictive and exclusive parental leave bill. A strong national paid family and medical leave policy makes a difference to me as a business owner who knows that caring for people is an important part of my bottom line. **Policies like this help small businesses like mine and the 20 employees I'm responsible for.**

Recently, one of my employees — who I'll call Charlie — told me his mother was ill and he was setting up a mother-in-law apartment to care for her. But, after working all day as an HVAC tech, he just didn't have the time and energy.

We were as flexible and understanding as we could be. We used earned sick time and paid time off as much as we could afford to. Charlie needed more, but he couldn't take unpaid time off with two kids in college, a mortgage, and medical expenses. Both his work and his attention to his mother suffered.

I've been through this with my own family, and I would have offered paid leave to my employees if I could have afforded it. But I couldn't. My business didn't have the money to pay for extended leave, and we didn't have the time or skills to manage and administer a paid family medical leave program on our own. **Setting up an insurance program, managing the qualifications, eligibility and writing the checks is outside our skill set.**

I need Charlie and other employees like him. Properly training and preparing a new HVAC tech takes five years at minimum. **Losing skilled employees and having to recruit and train new ones hurts our ability to help our customers and could cost us their business.** That's why I'm thankful for the paid family and medical leave policy we won in Massachusetts.



A strong national paid family and medical leave policy makes a difference to me as a business owner who knows that caring for people is an important part of my bottom line.

One of the many benefits of the new state paid leave insurance program is that no matter how big or small your business, you can offer this benefit. That means businesses like mine can provide employees with paid time to address family caregiving and medical needs and still have funds to pay for a replacement or more overtime for other employees to keep our business running. That should be true no matter what state you live in.

Policies like this are a win-win for families, workers, Main Street businesses, our communities and our economy. They help us all take the time to care for ourselves and our loved ones. And they help level the playing field between small businesses and big corporations, which have the market power to give good benefits to top managers while squeezing low-wage workers.

Karen Lamy DeSousa is the owner and president of Advance Air & Heat, a commercial HVAC contractor in Massachusetts

SPOTLIGHT: Diane Martin—Dee's Hot Dogs—New Bedford, Massachusetts



People often think “oh, it would be great to be a business owner. You can make your own schedule, take time off when you need it, and make lots of money.” While there is a benefit in being your own boss, you also have a lot of responsibility.

When my mother got sick, near the end of her life, she lived alone and needed 24-hour care.

Every day I'd come to the restaurant for as long as I could and then immediately return home to care for her. Although I know I was doing the right thing, I often felt guilty. I needed my business to succeed so I could take care of my family, and had one child in college at the time. **Taking time away was necessary, but also risky.**

After a few months her condition deteriorated and we knew it wasn't sustainable. Not just because I needed to be able to work during our busy season, but also because as things progressed, it took more and more attention and a physical person needed to be with her.

She moved in with us for a time, but the doctors recommended full-time care as the best option for her health and our family.

As we prepared to move her to a nursing home, her health failed rapidly, and she died shortly after.

Not being able to work as much as I used to, we had a serious financial loss.

My husband and I had worked hard and save up some money to buy some land in Lakeville near my husband's family where we hoped to retire one day. Buying the property was our retirement plan and we dreamed of a time we could spend near the water, and with the family.

Because of the financial loss of my income while I was caring for my mother, we had to sell the land and give up our dream of retiring at that location.

I treasure all the time I was able to spend with my mother, but it put a lot of stress on my business and my other family members.

A lot of attention is given to families when they have a new child, but caring for a seriously ill family member is going to become even more of an issue in the next few decades because the population is aging. More and more parents are going to need their adult children to have time for care.

As a business owner, I wear all the hats. I work weekends and nights. I run the show. I have a responsibility to my employees. They get paid first and I do my best and pay them a living wage and keep them as long as possible. I show up everyday, knowing that I'm taking a risk. I have to be present and know what is going on at all times, because details left unattended can lead to ruin.

For many small businesses we are one medical emergency away from a financial free-fall. Access to paid family and medical leave insurance helps level the playing field for small businesses against large corporations when we're competing for staff, but it could be a literal life-saver for small business owners like me and my husband.

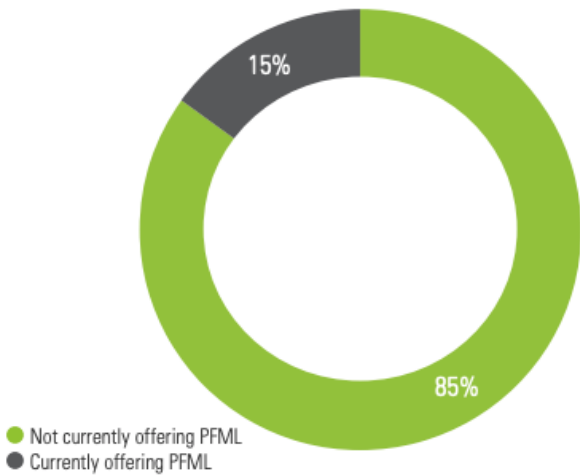
Access to paid family and medical leave... could be a literal life-saver for small business owners like me.

Diane Martin is the owner of Dee's Hot Dogs, now with two locations in Massachusetts

Large corporations see the benefit in providing this benefit, and many put it into their budget...it cost us a much larger percentage of our budget than it costs a large corporation to do the same.



Small Businesses Surveyed Currently Offering Paid Family & Medical Leave



Data from 2017 Main Street Alliance survey

Two years ago, my manufacturing shop supervisor and most experienced employee came to me with a problem: he needed a hip replacement, which would mean two months away from work.

All small businesses depend on their workers, particularly a specialized one like mine. It takes a lot of time to train someone in this unique field. We're thriving, but we run lean and can't afford a paid family and medical leave policy on our own as easily as many larger businesses can.

Large corporations see the benefit in providing this benefit, and many put it into their budget. Of course I paid my employee's wages until he was able to return to work. Otherwise he'd go without the surgery he needed or look for another job. But it cost us a much larger percentage of our budget than it costs a large corporation to provide the same.

I really couldn't afford to lose this employee and decided to do everything I could to retain him. But the decision wasn't easy, and my business took a financial hit. **No business should have to make a tough call like this.** Congress can and should do better for all of us by passing a real paid family and medical leave policy, like the FAMILY Act.

SPOTLIGHT: KB Brown—Wolfpack Promotionals—Minneapolis, Minnesota



So many small businesses and entrepreneurs fail because of one problem or misstep along the way, and too often, it has nothing to do with their business. I've seen this happen to many people who try to start their own business. And far too often, things have happened to me and my family that are beyond my control.

Recently, I was in a bad car accident. We had to close our doors and scale back our operations. My memory has been greatly impacted, and several issues – like my hand shaking – impact my ability in the shop. I still have two CAT scans and an MRI to do, and I start physical therapy soon. I am tired all the time, and I know I need to take time off, but I can't. **As a business owner, if you don't work, you don't eat.**

I try to look at the positives of my situation. We are lucky the accident happened with a rental, not our car. We have understanding, loyal customers and several projects in the works. If I didn't have my wife working with me, we would certainly have to shut down. Luckily, I have a partner who does most of the thinking for us both anyway and friends who help out.

The bottom line is, small businesses need more support from our country to thrive. A program like paid family and medical leave would really help me right now. I

would have the time I need to rest and recover without worrying about making my mortgage payment or putting food on the table.

Lots of small business owners and people live just one paycheck away from financial ruin, but given wealth disparities by race, people of color are far more at risk. Access to paid family and medical leave is important for everyone in Minnesota, but will make even more of an impact in communities like North Minneapolis.



I was in a bad car accident. My memory has been greatly impacted, and several issues impact my ability in the shop. I know I need to take time off, but I can't. As a business owner, if you don't work, you don't eat.

KB Brown is the owner of Wolfpack Promotionals, a promotional printing company in Minneapolis

The lack of paid leave is a huge problem for me as a small business owner.

I have five employees. When one of my employees broke both her arms two years ago, I had to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket for medical leave. This year, I have an employee who needs a hip replacement, and we expect that she will be out for 10 weeks. I want to be able to cover her, but doing so would be a huge financial hit to our business and our family. The last time we covered medical leave out of pocket, we fell behind on our commercial lease and home mortgage.

Our current case-by-case out-of-pocket practice could sink our business. Over and over, I have been told by legislators that we don't need a paid family leave insurance program, that I as a small business, I should do this voluntarily.

So I looked on the private market to see what insurance I could get there. I spent more than five hours researching, and I came up dry. For business owners, this is a game of who you go to and who you trust. The smaller the business, the more expensive it is and the less power you have to negotiate rates. Plans differ drastically, making them really difficult to compare.


The plans I reviewed all had one horrendous commonality: minimum hospital stay requirements.

When my employee broke her arms, her stay in the hospital was just two days, so that leave would not have been covered. The average stay in the hospital for a hip replacement is just 1-3 days. Therefore, this leave would also not be covered under any of the private temporary disability plans available to my small business.

For small businesses like mine, there are **NO** private insurance options on the market that will actually cover my employees in their time of need.

I took hours away from my business to speak to multiple companies and agents. I can tell you one thing for certain: For small businesses like mine, there are **NO** private insurance options on the market that will actually cover my employees in their time of need. **The private temporary disability plans out there fall short in many important ways.** They are expensive, ranging from \$200-300 per month for a business our size. They are peppered with harmful carve-outs and would fail to cover the situations we've already encountered. They contain waiting periods, minimum hospital stays, exclusions for cancer, and variance in plan offerings and pricing depending on which agent you talk to.

Small businesses need a transparent and reliable coverage option, and we need Congress to help to get there. A high-quality family and medical leave insurance plan will help my small business keep its valued employees and continue to grow and serve our community.

	Colonial Life (Agent 1)	Colonial Life (Agent 2)	Aflac	 under the PFML Act
MONTHLY PREMIUM <i>(per employee)</i>	\$49.95	\$35.32	\$22.63 <i>(50+ years old, rate increases by \$10)</i>	\$15.86
WAGE REPLACEMENT RATE	60%	60%	60%	66% avg. <i>(progressive scale of 90%-55%)</i>
LEAVE AVAILABLE	6 weeks	6 weeks	6 weeks	12 weeks
MINIMUM HOSPITAL STAY	7 days	7 days	None	None
EXCLUSIONS	Paternity leave, foster care, adoption, aging parent care, cancer	Paternity leave, foster care, adoption, aging parent care, cancer	Cancer	None
OTHER LIMITATIONS	Unknown	Unknown	Health screening required, must use all PTO first	None

Sarah Piepenburg is the co-owner of Vinaigrette, a family-owned and operated food store in Minnesota

SPOTLIGHT: Nakpangi Thomas —Thomas Traumatology Institute —Detroit, Michigan



Thomas Traumatology Institute works to provide mental health and trauma recovery services to children, families and the community. **Our business is built on trust and interpersonal relationships; we rely on our community.** We're dedicated to providing the best care possible for families in need. Every day we see families in crisis, and while we provide professional support, there are many times when our clients need a family member to be there for them or time off to care for themselves. **As a small business owner and a mental health specialist, I strongly support a paid family and medical leave social insurance program.**

SPOTLIGHT: Tameka Ramsey—T. Ramsey & Associates—Detroit, Michigan

T. Ramsey & Associates opened just over three years ago. We provide strategic planning and support to small businesses and nonprofits to help them grow. We're dedicated to creating opportunities for black women in Detroit to succeed; I employ single mothers with children who have physical health issues; women who have mental health issues; women who are the primary caregiver for their aging parent(s). **I understand that these women come to me at the intersection of being an employee, mother, daughter, wife; expert in their subject; but, most of all; being a black women.**

As a black woman entrepreneur, I started my business with limited resources, mostly on the support of me working a full time job and my husband's income. However, as I grew, I saw first hand how important it is to be able to show up for your family, during illness, school issues, doctor appointments and keep a job and have regular income. That is why I have offered paid sick time and paid family leave. Does it cut into my bottom line? Yes. Does it sometimes put a strain on myself and my staff? Yes. But, **I've done the math, and it would cost me way more to train new incoming staff than it does to provide paid leave.** But I've seen first hand that this is not an option for many small businesses and nonprofits. That's why we need a national paid medical and leave program like the FAMILY Act.

I saw first hand how important it is to be able to show up for your family, during illness, school issues, doctors appointments and keep a job and regular income.



Tameka Ramsey is the founder of T. Ramsey & Associates, a nonprofit consulting firm in Michigan

SPOTLIGHT: Tony Sandkamp—Sandkamp Woodworks—Jersey City, New Jersey

I'm a proud supporter of New Jersey's Family Leave Insurance Program, which helps small businesses like mine provide paid family and medical leave to my four employees. **All small businesses and workers, in every state, should be able to count on a program with the same benefits and protections. New Jersey's program worked for my business, and it should be the baseline for the country.**

Four years ago one of my employees came to me and said his wife was having twins. He needed help getting some paid time off, and we weren't sure what to do. Luckily, I had a friend who knew about the Family Leave Insurance Program. **The paperwork was pretty straightforward. We filled it out together and sent it in, and he got two thirds of his wages replaced while bonding with his twins.** He is a very important part of my business, and this was very important to his life. So we made adjustments, he got some paid time with his family, and he's still with us.

I also remember life before our paid leave program, and I know that's still the reality for most small businesses and workers around the country. In 2006, before there was any such program, I had an employee who had to leave his job because of family needs. I only found out after the fact that his mother was dying of cancer, around the Christmas season. He could have really used the New Jersey Family Leave Insurance then. This was awful for him. It was a tough loss for me personally since along with losing an employee, I also lost a longtime friend. It was also detrimental to my business. He had been my best employee for several years and performed many critical management functions. The costs of the time and money it took to replace him were astronomical. I had to take time away from my responsibilities as the owner to fill the gap in the interim.

The difference the state Family Leave Insurance Law has made for my employees and my business is clear.

And the program continues to improve. This year, we updated the definition of family to make it more representative of actual families. Now, for example, a person can take paid leave to care for a sibling. I know how important that is, because one of my sisters – who wasn't working at the time – cared for another one of my sisters until she passed away from stomach cancer.



The program continues to improve. This year, we updated the definition of family to make it more representative of actual families. Now, for example, a person can take sick leave to care for a sibling.

We also expanded job protection and increased wage replacement so more workers can afford to use the benefit. **All these changes are business friendly.**

The New Jersey Family Leave Insurance law allows small business owners like me to provide paid family and medical to my employees and ensure that no one is forced to choose between caring for serious family and medical needs or putting food on the table. It also helps that small businesses can recruit and retain dedicated employees, decreasing costly turnover expenses and strengthening our bottom lines.

Tony Sandkamp is the owner of Sandkamp Woodworks, an architectural woodworking business in New Jersey



I started my own dental practice just over two years ago, motivated by the need to create a family friendly work environment for myself and my employees. **I'd practiced at another office for six years, but I left during my pregnancy because the work culture there punished employees who chose to start or grow their families.** Totally upset with how I had been treated, after my son was born I knew I couldn't go back to work somewhere that didn't value parenthood and the contributions of parents to the workplace.

My husband and I started our practice with the idea that by treating our staff with the respect they deserve and giving them the autonomy they need, we'd create a strong business with a productive staff that takes pride in their work. Part of respecting our staff has been providing paid leave – paid holidays and paid time off they can use how they choose – but also longer paid leave options for parental leave or medical care that requires more time away from work.

Shortly after taking over the business I researched options for providing paid leave through private insurance. I found an insurance company and an agent, and now I purchase short-term disability at a group rate that my employees contribute to each pay period. The plans are more costly than they would be under a universal policy, and the benefits are lower. But it's what's available on the market.

We've made it work, and my employees know that if they need to take an extended time away from work they

won't be left without any income. **For me, this is about establishing trust with my staff and demonstrating that I value them not only as employees but as people.** I've even had an employee approach me about parental leave before they'd begun to start a family, wanting to make sure I had plenty of time to find the right temp to replace her.

Ensuring a healthy and supportive workplace is fundamental to running my business. I've seen how the failure to do so can negatively impact people and businesses. But leaving businesses like mine to put these policies together on our own, piecemeal, is costly and unproductive. Ultimately, it's led to the paid leave crisis our country faces right now. **We need a collective solution, one that accounts for small businesses and our employees.** Until then, people across Ohio and the country will be forced to choose between their jobs and the care they and their families need.

Leaving businesses like mine to put these policies together on our own, piecemeal, is costly and unproductive. We need a collective solution, one that accounts for small businesses and our employees.



Paid family and medical leave should support all workers, especially those who do some of the toughest work in the country in low-wage jobs and farmwork.

Mexican traditional foods such as tacos and taquitos. In 2015, I also started my own cleaning service. I have a vision to expand these businesses and hire employees.

Now I am my own boss, and I can spend time with my family and have flexibility. I can express my values, including supporting families in my business decisions. Understanding the challenges I went through in my previous employment without paid family and medical leave, **I fully support a Paid Family Medical Leave bill—including paying in to the program.** I want to be able to offer myself and my future employees the ability to take care of themselves and their families when hardships arise.

Family is an important value to me – and in the Latinx community. Supporting families through times of crisis with social insurance programs like Paid Family Medical Leave, would help small business owners like me retain good employees. It would also give me a way to express my commitment to family values as an employer. When I look back on my time off work due to my illness, the emotional and financial toll for my family was so high. Paid Family Medical Leave should support all workers, especially those who do some of the toughest work in this country in low-wage jobs and farmwork.

I immigrated to Woodburn, Oregon in my twenties with my eight month old baby. I worked for many years in low-paid jobs where the working conditions were difficult. First working in the tulip fields, as well as on other crops. Then in a tortilla shop with long days and no breaks. Next I spent 12 years working six, sometimes seven, days a week at a Mexican restaurant. **While working 14 hour days at the restaurant, I missed key moments in my children’s lives, but I was the primary provider and needed to work.**

At one point, I was diagnosed with Meningitis and had to take a whole month unpaid off work to heal. This was an incredibly difficult financial situation. I had to take the time off unpaid, and I was uninsured at the time. I was the main cook at the restaurant and was able to return to work. But the long hours and toxic work environment led me to start my own business in 2012. Now I run a catering company that specializes in

SPOTLIGHT: Amber Halbert Childress—High Ridge Roof Construction—Springfield, Oregon

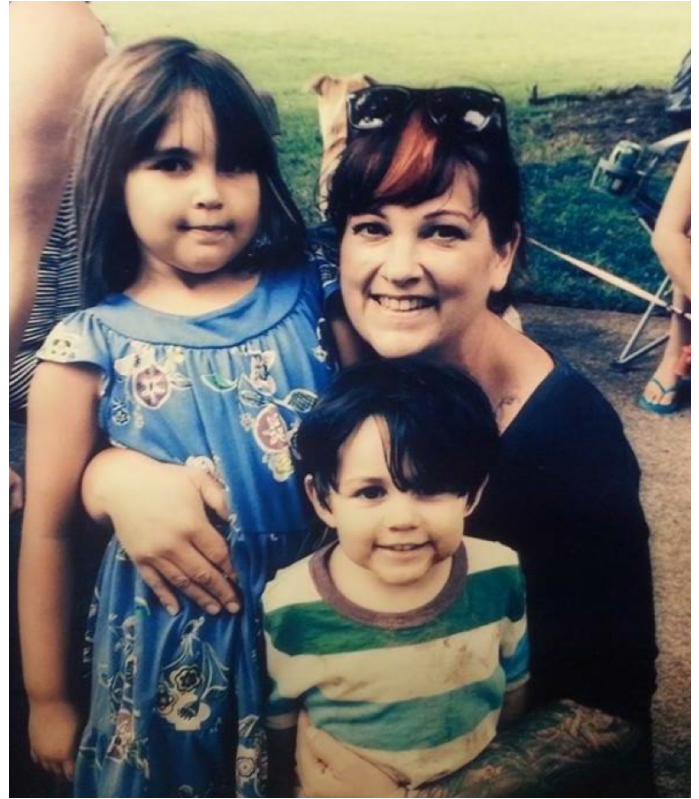
Recently, I gave birth to my third child. The concerns that come along with having a child at a more mature age pale in comparison to the stress that accompanied the pregnancy and birth of my first two children. Back then, I was waiting tables and bartending. I was on my feet all the time, and my growing belly took a toll on my body and overall health. To make matters worse, I did not have access to the leave I needed to heal and learn to be a mom after my babies arrived. **I had to be back at work and on my feet long before I should have been, and suffered both physical and emotional complications unnecessarily.**

This time around, I am the co-owner of a small construction and roofing business in Springfield, Oregon. I'm in a position that affords me the flexibility to heal and bond with my baby, but this support and flexibility shouldn't be a luxury. I needed this support when I was a server perhaps even more than I do today.

The FAMILY Act would create a paid family and medical leave insurance program. **This is the kind of program that reaches across socioeconomic lines to benefit everyone in America – women and men.**

I employ 10 men and women, and they too should have support to take time away from work when welcoming a new child, recovering from a serious illness, or caring for a loved one. Our society has changed. Women have taken on more and more responsibility – many becoming primary or secondary breadwinners for their families, but the shift has not included a balancing out of caregiving responsibility. **The FAMILY Act is a policy solution that normalizes this social transformation.** Men and women alike should be supported to care for their family members when it's needed. Fathers who take parental leave are more involved in their child's direct care as they continue to grow and develop.

I'm sharing my story because I can't make a paid family and medical leave policy a reality for my employees on my own. Like many small business owners, without the support of a statewide or national Paid Family and Medical Leave social insurance program, I am unable to provide this benefit to my team. It's time to support our small business economy by passing the FAMILY Act.



The FAMILY Act would create a paid family and medical leave insurance program. This is the kind of program that reaches across socioeconomic lines to benefit everyone in America—women and men.

Amber Halbert Childress is the co-owner of High Ridge Roof Construction, a construction and roofing business in Oregon



Paying a little bit over time for the insurance benefit just makes sense. Then, when I or when one of my employees need to take leave, the support is there. This is affordable for small business. What is not affordable is to have to pay for leave all at once.

A week after I gave birth to my child I had to go back to work. I had not been in business long and had no money saved. Luckily, my mom was able to come and be at my office to help care for my child while I was with patients. I had to nurse in between appointments, which was really stressful.

While my mother was able to help me out then, soon I may need to help her. She is getting older and has diabetes. If she was to get sick or have something serious happen, I don't know what I would do. I want a paid family and medical leave policy to be there, in case anything happens to her. Paying a little bit over time for the insurance benefit just makes sense. Then, when I or when one of my employees need to take leave, the support is there. **This is affordable for small business. What is not affordable is to have to pay for leave all at once.**

It could mean the difference between keeping the business open or us needing to close our doors, and my eight employees losing their livelihoods too.

Paid family and medical leave promotes a stronger economy, healthier families, and helps small businesses like mine thrive. It's a win-win for everyone. It's especially good for small business, helping to level the playing field with big corporations in hiring and retaining talented employees, and giving small business owners like me a way to get the medical care we need without jeopardizing our livelihood.



In 2019, the reality is that families come in all shapes and sizes. The definition of family in both a conceptual and definitive sense can no longer be limited to a married man and woman or a birth mother and her biological children. In fact, the overwhelming majority of households today do not fit into the ‘traditional nuclear family’ mold.

We need a paid leave program that both recognizes and respects this, and in turn allows for people to care for their family, biologically related or not. By making this change, we will not only provide a more honest reflection of what actual families in America look like, we will make a positive impact on individuals, such as those who identify as LGBTQ.

For many LGBTQ individuals, their family consists of both biological and non biological family. Sometimes all or most of their biological family is inaccessible, non-supportive, or distant (in both senses of the word). And, all or most of their chosen, non biological family is

where comfort, shelter, and love persist. **An inclusive definition of family has been successfully applied to federal workers for over 50 years now, and should be the standard for a national paid leave program.**

Should an employee want to take leave to care for a woman they consider their “Mother,” they would not be afforded the same legal protections. Irrespective of the fact that this woman took the employee in as a child into her heart and home when nobody else would, her non biological label puts her into the ‘not family’ category.

As a small business owner, I want my employees to be able to take leave to care for those they are closest to—whether it’s for their nuclear or chosen, biological or non-biological family. I affirmatively believe that by not changing these outdated ways of defining family we would be defying heart, logic, and facts, and giving into stagnancy; something that America definitely does not need right now.



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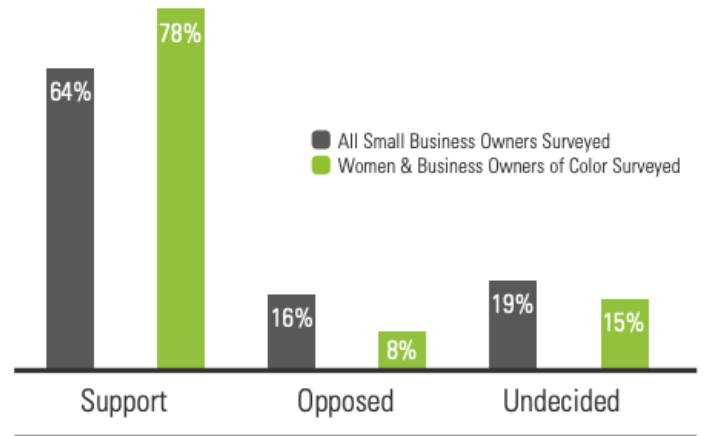
Passing the FAMILY Act is an urgent need for small businesses like my own. We need a comprehensive family and medical leave law that works for small business owners and our employees.

When I left my corporate pharmaceutical job to become a small business owner in Lancaster, PA, I never thought of it as a family planning decision. But having run my art gallery for two years now, and given the state of our family leave crisis in this country, I don't know how I could have another child and keep my business open.

There is simply no support for small business operators to take time away from their business to tend to personal needs (medical leave, parental leave, etc).

That's why we must pass the FAMILY Act. Passing the FAMILY Act is an urgent need for small businesses like my own. We need a comprehensive family and medical leave law that works for small business owners and our employees. I take pride in being a player in the revitalization of Lancaster, but it shouldn't have to come at the expense of my goals for my family.

Small Business Support of a National PFML Policy like the FAMILY Act



Data from 2017 Main Street Alliance survey

For businesses the size of mine, the math only adds up when we use the power of numbers that a universal system provides.

We're just a handful of people at my butcher shop, so I work side by side with each of my staff members. For that reason, it's important to me to build strong relationships with my employees. I want to show them the same care they show me by helping our business succeed.

Recently, an experienced staff member required surgery for a chronic neck condition that was causing him pain and limiting his ability to work. Doctors replaced several vertebrae in his neck, and, after a successful surgery, they ordered him to rest completely to fully recuperate.

He'd been responsible and saved the paid time off I could afford to offer—about two or three weeks—and was able to follow his doctors' orders for that time. But when the time he'd saved had been used, he returned to work, not wanting to lose out on income. I'm sure he'd have taken more time if he'd had it, and I'm equally sure he wouldn't disobey his doctors' advice without a strong reason. But reality meant he was back at work only a short time after this major surgery, doing the type of intensive, physical work that I imagine his doctors would have preferred that he avoided for a while longer.

Over half of FMLA requests for unpaid time off are to recover for personal medical reasons, but loss

of income means many people can't take their full recovery time. In addition, as a small employer of less than 50 employees - the job protection guarantees in the act do not even cover my employees.

We're a small enough shop that when someone takes time off it affects all of us. When a key staff member takes time away, it can be a challenge to keep the business running smoothly, but we all pitch in to make it work. That said, the solutions we've come up with have their drawbacks. Other staff members pick up shifts, which I'm very thankful for. But that can mean paying overtime on top of the salary being paid to the employee on leave. At a business the size of mine, that can be an uncomfortably large increase in payroll expenses.

Moving beyond unpaid leave into a paid leave insurance program would mean much smaller increments over time instead of footing the whole bill. **A paid leave social insurance program would allow me to use employee's salaries to cover overtime for other staff, hire a temporary replacement or however I see fit in my business,** while employees are still paid from the fund.

For businesses the size of mine, the math only adds up when we use the power of numbers that a universal system provides. Right now, the lack of a paid leave system holds small businesses back and leaves people choosing between their well being and their paycheck. An affordable, universal paid leave system will let employers like me give our employees the benefits we want to be able to provide and free us to keep looking for new opportunities to create jobs and serve our communities.



Donna Welch is the owner of Let's Meat on the Avenue, a butcher and specialty shop in Alexandria, VA



My uncle, Lawrence Hamlar, co-founded Hamlar-Curtis Funeral Home in 1952. For three generations, my family's business has served our neighbors in Roanoke during some of the most difficult times in their lives. We're motivated every day to provide the care and comfort each one of us deserves during these trying moments.

We've also done our best to extend that care to those who have chosen to work at our business. My uncle Lawrence was fond of saying, **"Take care of your people and they'll take care of you."** In the fifteen years since I've run our family business, I've tried to live his advice every day.

Which is why we strive to provide the best benefits we can for our employees, including medical, dental and vision insurance, and, importantly, paid leave for family and medical needs.

If someone needs to take time away from work to recover or care for a loved one, we want them to take that time. We also want them to keep their bills paid and their families fed, so they earn their salary even while they're out. We couldn't ask our staff to care for our neighbors in their times of need and then abandon them when they themselves need support.

Providing paid leave to our staff speaks to the values we've grown up with. But it's also an investment in our business.

Finding the right people to work in funeral services can be difficult. We need employees with strong interpersonal and emotional intelligence, staff members who can relate to people from all walks of life during some of the most trying moments in their lives. It's not easy work, and it can be draining.

Providing paid leave is one way we make sure we keep our great staff intact. We have employees who have been with us since just about the beginning. One has more than 50 years with the company, another more than 30. A third recently celebrated their 25th anniversary with us.

And while we're glad to provide paid leave, it's a significant cost for us to bear as a small business.

That's why we support a universal paid leave policy for Virginia and nationally, one that would cover all working Virginians, those at small businesses and large ones. It would help lower costs for businesses like mine, allowing us to expand our services, hire more employees and increase wages and benefits.

It's crucial that our representatives give small businesses like mine the support we need to help our employees navigate the life events we all face at one time or another—an unexpected illness, a sick spouse or parent, or welcoming a new child to the family.

In polarized times, paid leave is a policy that will help all Virginians. It has overwhelming, bipartisan support from small business owners: **66 percent say a comprehensive paid leave law should be a priority for Virginia.**

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SPOTLIGHT: Ricky Klein—Groennfell Meadery—Colchester, VT

Before the very first bubble came through an airlock at our meadery, we had already written rules: **“Your family comes first.”** Providing paid family and medical leave to our employees was never a question for us. We wanted to create good jobs so people in our community could support their families. We are employers first, and our business just happens to be making a fermented honey beverage called mead.

We offer three weeks of paid family and medical leave in addition to paid sick and two weeks of paid personal/vacation time off each year for every employee who works for us full-time. We also work in an industry where flexible scheduling is doable. All employees – from bartender to CEO – can tailor their schedule to stay home with a sick child, care for an ailing family member or attend a piano recital. **This was a huge undertaking for a new business, and we struggled to make it work in the beginning.** We were so lucky to have the resources we did.

After six years in business, our approach is paying off... We wouldn't be on this trajectory if it weren't for the dedication of our staff, which we believe is a direct result of the investment we made in them... these policies are good for our bottom line and the small business economy at large.



Ricky Klein is co-owner with his wife and CEO Kelly Klein of Groennfell Meadery, a craft mead producer in Vermont.

SPOTLIGHT: Ricky Klein—Groennfell Meadery—Colchester, VT con't

After six years in business, our approach is paying off; we just moved to a new facility that will allow us to triple our brewing capacity. We wouldn't be on this trajectory if it weren't for the dedication of our staff, which we believe is a direct result of the investment we made in them. At first, making this commitment was tough. Before we began turning a profit in 2016, we sometimes had to dig into our own pockets to make sure our employees got paid.

We know that for most small businesses robust employment benefits, like family and medical leave, just aren't possible without a public insurance program to level the playing field. **We want to see our fellow small business owners grow their operations and care for their employees just like we've been able to do.** Being able to offer paid family and medical leave helps small businesses vie for talented, committed employees in competitive markets.

Our daughter, Nora, just turned two. For us, this is personal. However, **these policies are also good for our bottom line and the small business economy at large.** Paid family and medical leave programs create a happier and more dedicated workforce, which reduces turnover – one of the single highest costs for small businesses.



There is more to life than work. Our children are only young once. We can put mead in cans and put it on the shelf any day of our lives. I could never forgive myself if I were the reason someone delayed starting a family, missed an important milestone in their child's life or a precious final moment with a loved one. We all deserve those moments, and paid family and medical leave for all is how we'll get there as a country.

I look forward to the day when all businesses, no matter their size, can see the positive impact paid family and medical leave and flexible, family friendly workplaces can have on their businesses and our local communities. But it's up to our legislators to create good public policy to get there. **Universal access to paid time off will have a positive ripple effect in our communities.** Families will be happier and healthier, our workforce and economy will be stronger and the next generation will have a foundation to thrive.



Owning a small business doesn't exempt you from the realities of everyday life. If anything, it makes you keenly aware of them. People get sick or injured. They start families. Their family members – children, parents and partners – need to be cared for. **Ignoring the inevitable only puts our businesses at risk**, jeopardizing our livelihoods and those of our employees.

I place my employees at the center of my decision making not because it makes sense for my business, although it does. I do it because it's a moral choice. I recognize the humanity in each of my employees, and that means supporting them as people, especially when they face challenges in their lives.

Well-Paid Maids provides a living wage to all staff, as well as a comprehensive benefits package that includes paid holidays and vacation, paid sick days, health, dental, and vision insurance, and 100% employer-paid short-term disability insurance should longer-term events arise. Through short-term disability insurance, my employees can take up to twelve weeks of leave per year and receive 60% of their average weekly income.

I've made providing paid leave a priority for my business, and I'm glad to do so, but it hasn't been without its challenges. Because our paid leave law in

Washington, DC, hasn't come into effect yet, I have to buy short-term disability insurance for my employees to have access to paid leave. This comes at a considerable cost and it lowers our margins. **What's more, because my business is small - we have ten employees - I'm not eligible for the range of policies offered to larger companies.** This means I have to buy disability insurance as a supplement to other insurance I buy, costing me even more.

Even paying these high rates, it's still been a battle to secure the benefits for my employees who have needed to take leave. Insurance companies don't make profits for their shareholders by generously paying out claims. I've had to fight tooth and nail, threaten escalation and aggressively assert my rights under our contract, just to get my insurer to make good on their obligations.

The effort is worth it. **I know my employees feel more secure for having access to paid leave.** And I know that the worker-friendly business model we've developed has helped us grow, responsibly and ethically. That said, I'm looking forward to July 2020, when DC's paid leave policy will come into full effect. My expenses for providing paid leave will be lowered and my employees will receive more generous benefits. I also expect I'll be spending less administrative time ensuring benefits are paid correctly and on time.

Universal paid leave will be a boon to DC workers and businesses. **We need a nationwide policy as soon as possible.** Paid leave shouldn't depend on where you live or who you work for, it should be as commonplace as the life events that necessitate it. Anything less ignores reality, devalues us as people, and weakens our community.

Paid leave shouldn't depend on where you live or who you work for, it should be as commonplace as the life events that necessitate it.

SPOTLIGHT: Marcia St. Hilaire-Finn —Bright Start Childcare and Preschool— Washington, DC

For my staff, caring for children is a labor of love, but it is also grueling work. In return for the work they do, I think it's important to ensure that my employees can care for themselves and their families. That's why they have paid sick days, vacation time and health insurance.

A national paid family leave insurance program would enable small businesses like mine to also offer workers paid family and medical leave — time to recover from serious illness, care for a sick loved one, or bond with a new child — without requiring employers to foot the entire bill.

Parents often ask about staff turnover when they consider which daycare to use. In the 12 years I've been running this business, I've experienced little turnover, and I believe our policies have a lot to do with it. **The FAMILY Act would ensure that high quality caregivers can keep their jobs, even when they must take temporary leaves.**



Parents often ask about staff turnover when they consider which daycare to use. In the 12 years I've been running this business, I've experienced little turnover, and I believe our policies have a lot to do with it.

Marcia St. Hilaire-Finn is the Managing Owner and Director of Bright Start Childcare and Preschool in Washington, DC

These are the voices of Main Street Alliance small business owners. Across the country, small business owners are coming together to share their experiences with paid family and medical leave. Small business owners are working families, and they support business practices and policies that help to boost the economy and reduce inequality.

A national paid leave social insurance program would make it affordable and accessible to small businesses, leveling the playing field between them and large corporations and increasing economic security for small business owners and their employees. Insights from these small business owners and additional follow up conversations, coupled with evidence and lessons learned from existing programs, have highlighted 10 key points to be considered as a part of a national paid family and medical plan.

Coverage

Ensure maximum benefit of the program to small businesses:

- **Equal, Universal Access:** Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) should be available to all businesses, regardless of size or sector, and to all individuals, whether they are employees that work part-time, full-time, individuals who are self-employed, or are independent contractors, or are business owners themselves. To ensure maximum benefit to small business, leave eligibility and benefits should not be determined by gender; everyone should have equal access. The PFML program also should be protected from carve-outs or opt-outs, which would undermine its universality and sustainability.
- **Comprehensive:** A PFML policy must be comprehensive and specific, covering parental, family, and personal medical needs. The policy must be broad enough to include the key reasons people need time away from their job. A PFML policy must be sufficient in length to meet people's medical/caregiving needs (a minimum of 12 weeks).
- **Inclusive:** The family definition should cover the full range of family configurations and care responsibilities that business owners and their employees face. Caregiving responsibilities often extend outside of the nuclear or residential family. A sound PFML program that meets the needs of today's workforce will reflect this reality. Accordingly, the PFML program should use language such as "related by blood or affinity" to define family.

Cost

Responsibly funded to make leave affordable for businesses of all sizes:

- **Affordable to Fund:** A PFML policy should be financed in a way that is affordable and cost-effective for small business owners and employees, with contributions made by both. This ensures funding that is sustainable over time and adequate to meet program needs. PFML should also provide a financially viable way for even the smallest business owner to offer leave.
- **Affordable to Use:** It must provide adequate, progressive wage replacement to enable all employees to take time off and meet their expenses, with almost full replacement for the take-home wages of lower-income employees and sufficiently high wage caps to ensure strong participation by middle-income families. This allows all employees to take the time they need, helps reduce gender bias in leave-taking and keeps money flowing in the local economy.
- **Public Social Insurance Funding:** The program should use a social insurance model, spreading costs across all businesses and business types and include a dedicated funding stream (that does not harm other essential programs). This easily allows benefits to be portable across jobs and employment sectors, ensuring everyone that pays in is fully covered by benefits.

Implementation & Administration

Designed to support employers and provide stability to businesses:

- **Efficient, Public Administration:** The program should be publicly administered. This approach will ensure administrative simplicity for small business owners, ensure that program funds be used for benefits rather than for third-party profits, and protect sensitive information.
- **Solution-Oriented Support and Protection:** The PFML program should provide stability to small business owners and include a robust outreach program (during implementation and beyond) supported by a dedicated budget. Additionally, to address any concerns about an extended employee absence, at a minimum the program should provide education and technical assistance to help businesses adapt. The program also must offer

stability to employees, providing predictability as they return to work.

- **Streamlined Implementation:** Implementation should be simple and minimize small business owners' administrative responsibilities. Furthermore, the employee, not employer, should be responsible for filing leave claims and verifying materials, and a compliance grace period should be available as small business owners adjust to their new responsibilities and any unexpected complications.
- **Set a Benefits Floor:** The federal program should build off existing programs to maximize efficiency (without preempting more comprehensive state programs) and include dedicated funding for employer outreach and education.





The Main Street Alliance works to provide small businesses a voice on the most pressing public policy issues. Our advocacy promotes vibrant businesses and healthy communities, and fosters leadership development of socially responsible business leaders.