



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog
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Paid Leave Would Help DC Families

By Ed Lazere

A proposal to establish paid family leave insurance in the District would help DC residents remain financially stable, by replacing some or all of their wages when workers take time off to be with a new child or to deal with an illness.

This would be especially important to low- and moderate-income residents, who typically do not have paid leave benefits and risk losing their jobs and getting behind on bills when they need to take time from work. And by keeping families from falling into financial chaos, paid family leave can help parents provide the stable environment needed to help their children succeed.

At a time of falling wages and high unemployment for DC residents without a college degree, paid family leave can help more families thrive. The [proposal](#) before the DC Council would provide up to 16 weeks of leave when a worker has a new child, faces an illness, or needs to care for an ill relative.

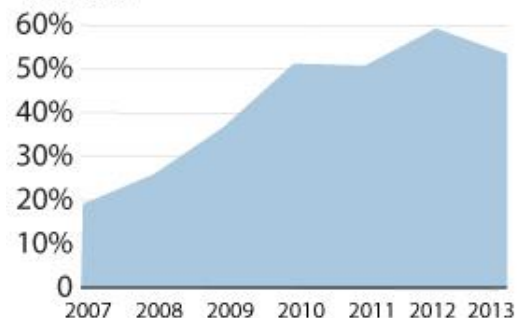
Paid family leave would help workers when they need to take leave from work: when they have a child, when they are sick, or when they are needed to care for a family member. Many DC residents end up with low incomes because they must leave their jobs for family reasons and then face difficulties getting back to work.

This is important because the DC economy – while looking strong on the surface – actually is daunting from the perspective of many residents.

- Many workers without a college degree still have trouble finding work, despite years of economic growth since the recession. The unemployment rate of high school graduates is now 19 percent – nearly twice as high as in 2007.
- Residents who lose their job increasingly stay unemployed for an extended period. In 2012, for example, more than half of the city's African American residents who lost their jobs stayed out of work more than six months. In 2007, just one-fifth of unemployed workers had this kind of trouble.

More Unemployed Black DC Workers Are Staying Out of Work Extended Periods

Share of Unemployed Black Workers Who Are Unemployed for At Least 6 Months



Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey data
DC FISCAL POLICY INSTITUTE

- DC residents with a high school degree have seen their pay drop \$2 an hour since 2007, after adjusting for inflation. This likely includes workers who lost a job and had to settle for a new one at lower pay.

By helping DC residents keep their jobs and sustain their incomes, paid family leave will ensure residents have money to pay their mortgages or rent and have more to spend at neighborhood businesses, helping the DC economy. It also will help parents maintain a nurturing environment for their children. A growing body of work shows that unstable and unhealthy housing, exposure to violence, and other factors related to poverty can create high levels of stress for children, with [long-term impacts on brain development and cognitive skills](#). By contrast, helping families avoid financial stress not only helps them get by, but also has [long-term benefits](#) including better health, more education, improved earnings, and economic self-sufficiency.

Paid family leave is vitally important to building and maintaining healthy families and strong communities in DC.