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California Giving Working Moms Needed Time With Families

Experts, Advocates Praise California Paid Leave as Key for Mothers, But Too Few Taking Advantage

Oakland - Data released by the Paid Family Leave Coalition today found that while more than 50 percent of Californians state they will need some form of paid leave in the next five years, only 29 percent know that they are paying into such a program. The study also found that while many Californians were unaware of the two-year-old program, those who have taken advantage of it say it worked well for them. California is currently the only state in the nation with a comprehensive paid family leave law.

At an event in Oakland, Joan Blades co-author of *The Motherhood Manifesto* applauded California's Paid Family Leave Law, saying "if the United States is to have a vibrant future, mothers need workplaces that support families. California Paid Family Leave is an important tool for working parents, particularly mothers, to use in balancing family responsibilities and workplace demands."

The study also found that one in five workers took leave in the past year and 90 percent returned to the same job, suggesting that Paid Family Leave is not only good for employees, but also for businesses, who do not have to pay into the program but reap the rewards of a more stable, experienced workforce.

"The Paid Family Leave program costs employers nothing and helps them retain qualified, trained employees," said Art Pulaski, Executive Secretary-Treasurer of California's Labor Federation. "It has made California a leader in recognizing the economic and social value of family-friendly work."

California's Paid Family Leave law (Kuehl) provides most Californians with up to six weeks of partial pay when taking leave from work to bond with a new baby, foster, or adopted child or to care for a seriously ill parent, spouse, child, or domestic partner. The benefits are entirely employee-funded through California's State Disability Insurance (SDI) program and allow workers to collect up to 55 percent of their salary, up to a maximum of \$840 per week. Employers pay nothing.

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"Every moment in a newborn's life is precious and the more time parents spend bonding with their babies, the greater impression it will have on the rest of their lives," said Kris Perry, Executive Director of First 5 California. "We are proud to partner with the Paid Family Leave Coalition in an effort to help more parents better understand the benefits of California's Paid Family Leave Law."

While the federal Family Medical Leave Act grants 12 weeks of unpaid leave to eligible employees at large companies, many working parents cannot afford to take time off work without pay. Studies show that the parent-bond in the first few months is crucial to a child's healthy development. But mothers, who still are the majority of primary caregivers, cannot afford the extra time from work to bond with a new baby without paid family leave.

Motherhood in America is at a critical juncture but California Paid Family Leave demonstrates how *The Motherhood Manifesto's* larger agenda can be successfully realized. In addition to paid leave, the authors call for healthcare for all children, quality after-school programs and children's television, affordable childcare, flexible work schedules and fair and realistic wages. Blades and her co-author, Kristen Rowe-Finkbeiner are also the co-founders of a new online grassroots organization, Moms Rising, that champions motherhood and family issues.

The event is hosted by BANANAS, Inc. and the Paid Family Leave Coalition, a statewide group of unions, social services and advocacy organizations, working to educate California's working families about paid family leave.

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