



Statement of Joan Blades
Co-Author, *The Motherhood Manifesto*
Co-Founder, MomsRising

The United States is one of only two industrialized countries that doesn't guarantee *paid* family leave. That lack is sorely felt among American families. Although you have it here in California, paid family leave is one of several policies that should be in place for all American families. *The Motherhood Manifesto*, a book I recently co-authored with Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, takes a close look at why we need paid leave and a host of other policies, including quality, affordable childcare; healthcare coverage for all children; quality afterschool programs and children's television; flexible work hours; and fair wages. And it shows us how we can mobilize to get these things.

One story, in particular, illustrates how important paid family leave is and how hard life is without it. Like nearly two thirds of all American families with children, James and Selena both worked out of necessity. So when Selena got pregnant with their second child, they sat down to figure out how much unpaid leave they could afford for Selena to take. Unfortunately, their son, Connor, was born six weeks early and had to be put in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for the first two and a half weeks of his life. Without the advantage of paid family leave, Selena decided to return to work the following Monday and take unpaid leave once Connor left the hospital. Trying to juggle work, home and seeing and caring for her newborn in the hospital, made for what Selena calls "the hardest two and a half weeks of my life."

Paid family leave is good for mothers, families, businesses and society. It improves prenatal and postnatal care, allows for more intense parental bonding and lowers accident rates in the first year of life. It increases the likelihood of children being immunized, resulting in lower death rates for infants. Lack of paid leave can devastate families. A quarter of "poverty spells," or times when a family's income falls below what it needs to cover basic living expenses, begin with the birth of a baby. This shouldn't happen. I'm proud to be a Californian because we have paid family leave, but every family in America needs it.

Joan Blades is a co-founder and President of Moms Rising, a new grassroots online activist organization that champions core motherhood and family issues – like health care, child care and work/family balance – in political, social, and economic spheres. Moms Rising mobilizing millions of women who have not previously been active, educating people about the problems facing mothers and families, and providing avenues for common sense solutions to those problems.

With Moms Rising co-founder and Executive Director Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, Blades is also the co-author of *The Motherhood Manifesto*. Released on Mothers Day 2006, *The Motherhood Manifesto* makes the case that it's time for a broad change in America's support for mothers and families. In both public and private sectors, radical shifts are needed to make parenting and the workplace compatible. *The Motherhood Manifesto* identifies obstacles facing working mothers today, and proposes concrete solutions.