

## **Embargoed Until June 29, 2004**

Paid Family Leave Coalition

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## **Californians Have Access to First Paid Family Leave Program in the Country**

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### **Statewide Study Shows Broad Support for Law, Lack of Knowledge About Accessing Benefits**

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SACRAMENTO – On July 1, California's new Paid Family Leave Law goes into effect, providing most Californians six weeks of partial pay when taking leave from work to care for a seriously ill parent, spouse, child, or domestic partner, or to bond with a new baby, foster, or adopted child. A recent study by the California Family Leave Research Project shows that, despite extensive public support for paid leave, only 22% of Californians are aware that they are eligible for the benefits.

Introduced by Senator Sheila Kuehl, sponsored by the California Labor Federation, and signed into law by Gov. Gray Davis, this groundbreaking legislation creates the first comprehensive paid leave program in the nation. (While the federal Family Medical Leave Act grants 12 weeks of unpaid family leave to eligible employees at large companies, many working families cannot afford to take the time off work without pay.) Paid Leave benefits are entirely employee-funded through California's State Disability Insurance (SDI) program and allows employees to collect up to 55% of their salary, up to a maximum of \$728 per week, while caring for their loved ones. Employers will pay nothing.

"I am immensely proud to have authored this historic legislation. Paid family leave will make it possible for thousands of Californians to meet their family responsibilities while keeping their jobs," said Senator Kuehl. "Employers will be able to retain skilled employees without having to pay for their time off. Families will be stronger, workplaces will be stabilized and, as families are more secure, communities will be strengthened, as well."

A state-wide study by the California Family Leave Research Project, headed by Ruth Milkman at the University of California, Los Angeles, reveals that slightly more than half of California employers already provide family and medical leave benefits beyond what is required by the current federal law and those that do may benefit from higher employee retention rates and reduced costs associated with recruiting and training new employees. The study also found that while 85% of adults surveyed favored a law guaranteeing partially paid leave, only 22% were aware of California's new Paid Family Leave Law.

Paid Family Leave comes at a critical time when there are more families that depend on two incomes than ever; more single-parent households; and a growing number of workers who need to care for ailing family members. Studies indicate that of the thousands of caregivers under age 65 in California who are juggling caregiving and job responsibilities, 15% had to reduce their work hours and another 15% were forced to quit their jobs to handle family responsibilities. Paid family leave will allow these family caregivers, the unsung heroes of the nation's healthcare crisis, to care for elderly parents without losing their jobs and will help new parents give their children the time and attention they need for a healthy adulthood.

“Study after study tells us what we already know, that the parent-child bond during the first few months is vital to a child's healthy development,” said Rob Reiner, Chair of First Five California, a commission dedicated to improving the lives of children age 0-5. “Now parents will have the opportunity to strengthen that critical bond.”

California is leading the nation by demonstrating that paid family leave is crucial to a healthy society.

The Paid Family Leave Coalition, a statewide group of unions, social services and advocacy organizations, is working to educate California's working families about paid family leave. Members of the Coalition include: **Labor Project for Working Families; Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center; National Partnership for Women & Families; California Labor Federation, Office of Senator Sheila Kuehl; First 5 California; Family Caregiver Alliance/National Center on Caregiving; Equal Rights Advocates; California National Organization for Women; CA Commission on the Status of Women; Asian Law Caucus; California Women's Law Center; and Southern California ACLU.**

For further information about these benefits, qualifications and how to apply, visit:

<http://www.paidfamilyleave.org> or [www.edd.ca.gov](http://www.edd.ca.gov).

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