

Testimony of Archbishop Borys Gudziak,
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United States Senate Committee on Finance
Hearing on “Exploring Paid Leave:
Policy, Practice, and Impact on the Workforce”
October 25, 2023

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has long supported family leave.¹ It is pro-life to support families as they welcome new life and care for one another in their most vulnerable periods. National support of paid family leave is an important step towards building an authentically life-affirming society that prioritizes the well-being of families.

Catholic tradition teaches that the purpose of the economy is to enable families to thrive. “[I]t is necessary that businesses, professional organizations, labor unions and the State promote policies that, from an employment point of view, do not penalize but rather support the family nucleus.”² Our tradition also holds that the State must help attain the common good and that government action is necessary to address problems that are beyond the reach of individual and community efforts alone.³

The research is clear: paid leave supports families. Parental leave is beneficial for child development and infant health;⁴ it strengthens the parent-child bond;⁵ it increases family stability;⁶ and at a time when maternal health is worsening in the United States, it aids new mothers’ mental and physical health.⁷ Medical leave allows workers to pursue medical treatment earlier in their illness and to better manage their care throughout their illness.⁸ Caregiving leave allows family members to better respond to the needs of their loved ones, which is especially important as our nation’s population ages and the number of people involved in informal caregiving of older adults is expected to grow.⁹ Workers with access to paid leave are less likely to experience material hardship and financial instability.¹⁰

The United States is one of only a handful of countries, and the only high-income country, that does not guarantee paid family leave.¹¹ The current patchwork system of family leave programs leaves too many families behind. For example:

- Only one in four U.S. workers had access to paid family leave last year.¹²
- Only 56% of U.S. employees are eligible for unpaid leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), based on employer and work history requirements.¹³
- Only 43% of private employees and 27% of state and local government employees have access to short-term disability insurance.¹⁴
- Low-wage workers are less likely to have access to paid family leave benefits than high-wage workers.¹⁵
- Black and especially Hispanic workers are less likely to have access to these benefits than white workers.¹⁶

Given the gaps in the current paid family leave offerings, a national paid leave policy is needed to help ensure families, especially those who are most vulnerable, have access to paid family leave. Many employers would like to offer paid family leave but cannot do so financially without a national or state architecture in place to make it more feasible. **As you work to advance paid family leave proposals, I urge you to ensure that such a proposal will not unduly burden lower-income organizations or individuals, will not penalize larger families, and will not destabilize existing social service programs.** I encourage your continued efforts to help families and welcome the opportunity to work with you to accomplish this goal.

¹ See United States Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, 1986, https://www.usccb.org/upload/economic_justice_for_all.pdf; United States Catholic Conference, *Putting Children and Families First*, 1991, <https://www.usccb.org/putting-children-and-families-first-challenge-our-church-nation-and-world>.

² Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 294, 2004, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

³ See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 168, 2004, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Place at the Table*, 2002, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/place-table>; USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, no. 48, 2020, <https://www.usccb.org/resources/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship-pdf>.

⁴ Lindsey Uniat and Maya Rossin-Slater, “Paid Family Leave Policies and Population Health,” *Health Affairs*, March 28, 2019, <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hpb20190301.484936/>.

⁵ Raquel Plotka and Nancy A. Busch-Rossnagel, “The Role of Length of Maternity Leave in Supporting Mother–Child Interactions and Attachment Security Among American Mothers and Their Infants,” *International Journal of Child Care and Education Policy* 12, no. 2, January 16, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40723-018-0041-6>.

⁶ Richard J. Petts, Daniel L. Carlson, and Chris Knoester, “If I [Take] Leave, Will You Stay? Paternity Leave and Relationship Stability,” *Journal of Social Policy* 49, no. 4, November 14, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047279419000928>.

⁷ Maureen Sayres Van Niel et al., “The Impact of Paid Maternity Leave on the Mental and Physical Health of Mothers and Children: A Review of the Literature and Policy Implications,” *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 28, no. 2, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1097/hrp.0000000000000246>; Zoe Aitken et al., “The Maternal Health Outcomes of Paid Maternity Leave: A Systematic Review,” *Social Science & Medicine* 130 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.02.001>.

⁸ Washington Center for Equitable Growth, “Paid Medical Leave Research,” April 30, 2020, <https://equitablegrowth.org/research-paper/paid-medical-leave-research/>.

⁹ Juliana M. Horowitz, “Americans Widely Support Paid Family and Medical Leave, but Differ over Specific Policies,” Pew Research Center, March 23, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/03/23/americans-widely-support-paid-family-and-medical-leave-but-differ-over-specific-policies/>.

¹⁰ Alexandra Boyle Stanczyk, “Does Paid Family Leave Improve Household Economic Security Following a Birth? Evidence from California,” *Social Service Review* 93, no. 2, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1086/703138>; Linda Houser and Thomas P Vartanian, “Pay Matters: The Positive Economic Impacts of Paid Family Leave for Families, Businesses and the Public,” Rutgers Center for Women and Work, January 2012, <https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/pay-matters.pdf>; Chantel Boyens, Michael Karpman, and Jack Smalligan, “Access to Paid Leave Is Lowest among Workers with the Greatest Needs,” Urban Institute, July 14, 2022, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/access-paid-leave-lowest-among-workers-greatest-needs>.

¹¹ WORLD Policy Analysis Center, “Is Paid Leave Available to Mothers of Infants, Including Maternity and Parental?,” January 2022, <https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/policies/is-paid-leave-available-to-mothers-of-infants-including-maternity-and-parental>.

¹² Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, “Employee Benefits – EBS Latest Numbers,” 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/latest-numbers.htm>; Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Employee Benefits in the United States, March 2023,” September 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/employee-benefits-in-the-united-states-march-2023.htm>.

¹³ Scott Brown et al., Abt Associates, “Employee and Worksite Perspectives of the Family and Medical Leave Act: Executive Summary for Results from the 2018 Surveys,” U.S. Department of Labor Chief Evaluation Office, July 2020, https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/WHF_FMLA2018SurveyResults_ExecutiveSummary_Aug2020.pdf.

¹⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, “Employee Benefits in the United States – March 2023,” September 21, 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ebs2.pdf>.

¹⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, “The Economics Daily: A look at paid family leave by wage category in 2021,” January 10, 2022, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2022/a-look-at-paid-family-leave-by-wage-category-in-2021.htm>.

¹⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, “Racial and ethnic disparities in access to and use of paid family and medical leave: evidence from four nationally representative datasets,” January 2019, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2019/article/racial-and-ethnic-disparities-in-access-to-and-use-of-paid-family-and-medical-leave.htm>.