



**TESTIMONY OF:**

Linda Kanney

Public Policy Chair

National Coalition of 100 Black Women Central Ohio Chapter

**IN SUPPORT OF:**

House Bill 91

*To enact a statewide paid family and medical leave insurance program*

House Insurance Committee

February 12, 2020

Chair Brinkman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Minority Member Boggs, and distinguished members of the Ohio House Insurance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of Ohio House Bill 91, the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act.

My name is Linda Kanney and I serve as the Public Policy Chair of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women Central Ohio Chapter, an organization that advocates on behalf of Black women and girls in Central Ohio, serving Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, and Licking Counties. We are committed to being a visible and vocal force to reduce disparities in health, education and economic empowerment. Access to paid family and medical leave is core to these values and to the success of the women and girls we represent in the community.

The United States falls behind the rest of the world when it comes to paid family leave, as the only industrialized nation on earth without a national standard. Because of this shortfall, nationally, only 19 percent of workers have access to paid family leave through an employer. While there has been a growing trend over the last few years from our nation's top employers and across the largest employment sectors implementing or improving their paid family and medical leave policies, these policies have left behind the workers who need access to the policy the most: women, people of color, specifically Black women and low-wage workers.<sup>1</sup>

The status quo is not working. Our workplace policies are out of touch with the reality of families in the 21st century and the needs of the modern workplace, leaving far too many working people with the false choice between the family they love and the income they need.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://paidleave.us/plusemployertrendsreport>

The consequences of inaction are especially severe for women of color, specifically Black women, and women who serve as family caregivers.

The conversation around paid family leave is often narrowly focused on parental leave for new parents, but this leaves behind working people who need access to family caregiving and personal medical leave - the two types of leave that are the most needed. Nearly 75 percent of F.M.L.A. leave is actually taken to care for a loved one or for an individual's own injuries and illnesses. This means having access to paid, job protected time off to care for a family member during a more severe medical situation is critically important. It could be an aging parent who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, a spouse battling cancer, or a mother who has just had a hip replaced and requires extra support at home.

Paid family leave is more than just a "woman's issue;" it is a family issue and an economic issue. But because women are more likely to take on caregiving duties in their households - for children and other family members - it is women who are disproportionately affected by the lack of access to a policy. Black and Latina women are even less likely to have access to paid leave, which exacerbates the wealth gap and racial disparities among families of color and white families. And for women in the "sandwich generation," who are providing care for their own children and their parents, the need for comprehensive and inclusive paid family and medical leave is even greater.

We are currently facing a caregiving crisis, and without a paid family leave policy, families, businesses, and our state as a whole is ill equipped to address the needs of older adults and working people who provide care to aging or ill family members. Currently, more than 1.4 million Ohioans are caring for an aging family member, and in less than 15 years, the share of our state's population, aged 65 and older is expected to grow by nearly 40 percent. Combine this with the fact that 62 percent of working people in Ohio do not have access to even *unpaid* leave through F.M.L.A., this crisis is urgent and requires your attention.<sup>2</sup>

The caregiving needs of Ohioans are significant, and the need for paid family leave will only continue to grow as our state's population age and it becomes more common for workers to serve as caregivers to older family members. Access to paid family and medical leave is foundational to workplace support to allow working people to provide care for a loved one without risking their job or their paycheck. Without access to a comprehensive, inclusive, and accessible paid leave policy, family caregivers can face far-reaching economic consequences as a result of taking unpaid leave, scaling back work hours, or leaving the workforce entirely to meet their caregiving responsibilities. A recent study from MetLife and the National Alliance for Caregiving estimated that women lose an average \$324,044 in compensation due to unpaid caregiving duties.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/paid-leave/paid-leave-means-a-stronger-ohio.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/02/working-daughters-eldercare/459249/>

I stand here as an advocate for Black women in our community who need access to paid family leave to support stronger health outcomes, economic empowerment and financial security, and workforce participation, but there are countless other people in this state who deserve to have their voices heard, too: The new parent who is forced to return to work far too soon after welcoming a child into their family. The worker who is juggling cancer treatment on top of their work schedule and family obligations. And the family caregiver who provides essential care to a mother who is battling Alzheimer.

For the hundreds of thousands of unpaid family caregivers across our state, this policy would be life-changing to help them balance their demands of work and their responsibilities to their family. Unfortunately, they also face many barriers to providing testimony in-person, and their experiences must be central to the policymaking process, and I urge the committee to continue to hold hearings on this bill to allow for their voices to help inform this legislation.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 91. I am available to answer any questions this morning or by email at [publicpolicy@nc100bwoc.org](mailto:publicpolicy@nc100bwoc.org).

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