

## 2022 AAUW-WA WA Quick Facts on Paid Family Medical Leave

### Paid Family and Medical Leave - State Laws

We need to know a candidate's position on [paid family and medical leave \(PFML\)](#) and their commitment to fully funding our current program, including investments in staffing to administer the program.<sup>i</sup>

Advocacy groups have expressed concerns about candidates who express anti-government bureaucracy rhetoric and the impact they could have on PFML program success.<sup>ii</sup> PFML is a good example of a program that benefits employees, employers, families and the community that will fail without adequate government funding and staff support. Legislation to continue to improve our PFML laws are needed. Last session a surprise report about program funding shortfalls derailed program improvement legislation to focus on more urgent funding-related issues.<sup>iii</sup> We anticipate new legislation in 2023 to address program process improvements.<sup>iv</sup>

Washington state is considered a leader in Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) laws.<sup>v</sup>

- In 2021 we passed [SB 5097](#) which changed the definition of "family" allowing more workers to participate in PFML.
- In 2022 we passed [S2SB 5649](#) to include up to 7 day bereavement under PFML under certain circumstances (eg. death of a child).
- In 2021 we passed [HB 1073](#) to provide grants to employees ineligible for PFML benefits due to insufficient hours worked, as well as grants to smaller employers with employees taking leave. PFML and affordable childcare benefit employees and employers.<sup>vi</sup>

Many parents, particularly women, cannot return to the workforce without access to PFML and affordable childcare.<sup>vii</sup> Unemployment, childcare, and pregnant worker protections are related issues.

**General PFML Questions - State:** Washington state is considered a leader in Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) legislation.

**Question:** What is your position on Paid Family and Medical Leave, and how important do you think this program is in our state. What policy changes would you support related to PFML?

In 2021 we expanded the definition of family from "Family member means the employee's child, grandchild, grandparent, parent, sibling, or spouse" to Family member means "any individual who regularly resides in the employee's home or where the relationship creates an expectation that the employee care for the person, and that individual depends on the employee for care."

**Question:** Do you support the expanded definition of "family" as part of our Paid Family and Medical Leave program.

In Washington state many of our labor-related laws exempt small business, sometimes a small business is an employer with fewer than 15 employees, sometimes it is 50 employees.

**Question:** Do you support exemptions from labor laws for small business? If so what do you consider a small business?

### Paid Family and Medical Leave - Federal Laws

Unlike most developed countries, the United States does not guarantee paid annual leave, paid time off for illness or family care, or paid parental leave. While the COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on this important issue, our protections are still wholly inadequate. Even if available through the existing

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federal FMLA program, many workers cannot afford to take unpaid leave without endangering their economic security. A federal paid leave program would build stronger families and healthier workers and allows ill or injured workers time to recover, reducing hospital readmissions and health care costs. Paid leave helps businesses by improving employee retention and reducing the high costs of turnover.<sup>viii</sup>

**General PFML Question - Federal:** Federal legislation was introduced in 2021 to improve our current federal unpaid leave program. [FAMILY Act](#) would create a national self-funding paid family and medical leave insurance program. It was co-sponsored by State Senator Patty Murray; 7 out of 10 of our House Representatives were co-sponsors of the House bill. The [Healthy Families Act](#) would provide full-time employees the right to earn up to seven job-protected paid sick days a year. Workers could use these sick days for their own medical needs, to provide care for a sick family member, or to recover from or seek assistance related to an incident of domestic violence, stalking or sexual assault. It was sponsored by Senator Patty Murray and co-sponsored by Senator Cantwell; 7 out of 10 of our House Representatives co-sponsored the companion House bill.

**Question:** What is your position on federal policies to support Paid Family and Medical Leave? Will you commit to working to pass the FAMILY Act and the Healthy Family Act?

**Question:** What is your position on our Washington state Paid Family and Medical Leave policies that include an expanded definition of family and exemption for small businesses?

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<sup>i</sup> See the Economic Opportunity Institute [report](#). "Lack of sufficient staffing over the entire first two years of Washington's PFML program created barriers to access for everyone. It prevented timely application processing and delivery of benefits, deterred some people from applying altogether, and frustrated employers.

<sup>ii</sup> Key lessons learned about PFML programs. See [EOI report](#).

<sup>iii</sup> [Shortfall in PFML program](#). Economic Opportunity Institute report.

<sup>iv</sup> Improvements in the application process, expansion of the program to reach more working moms and dads, and family caregivers; outreach and education to employees, job applicants and businesses; and an associated School/Parent leave policy are being considered. [EOI listening sessions](#) with BIPOC communities provides additional recommendations. There are several good summaries of PFML state laws. See National Conference on State Legislatures State [Family and Medical Leave Laws](#).

<sup>v</sup> See the [National Partnership for Women & Families 2022 Report](#). In 2017, WA create a Paid Family and Medical Leave Program ([SB 5975](#)). In 2018-2020 bills were introduced and passed to "fine-tune the program" as issues came up during implementation.

<sup>vi</sup> See [AAUW Quick Facts on Paid Leave 2022](#).

<sup>vii</sup> See Politico July 2022 article [The pandemic drove women out of the workforce, will they come back?](#)

<sup>viii</sup> See See AAUW [Where We Stand on Paid Family and Medical Leave](#). AAUW belongs to the [Paid Sick Days Coalition](#) that advocates for the Healthy Families Act. See [AAUW Voter Issues Guide](#).