

Paid parental leave improves life for Alabama workers

By Dev Wakeley, worker policy advocate | January 2025

Overview

We all benefit when new parents are able to dedicate more time to bonding with their children. Paid parental leave is a crucial policy to promote stronger families, and it also helps more people remain in the workforce and continue to contribute to our economy. Alabama lawmakers should embrace the opportunity to ensure paid parental leave is available for all state employees and teachers.

Paid parental leave's benefits for Alabama children and parents are clear and broad. Babies have better outcomes across the board when their parents can stay with them in the crucial weeks after birth. Fewer babies are born with dangerously low birth weights when mothers have paid leave to address medical issues throughout pregnancy. Paid leave also cuts the risk of rehospitalization in half for mothers and infants following birth.

From an economic perspective, paid leave also makes sense for employers because it reduces employee turnover. This policy can help employers save the equivalent of 50% to 200% of a worker's salary on hiring and training a new worker to replace one who otherwise might have

to quit to meet caregiving duties. Paid parental leave is a common-sense, pro-family policy that will result in a better, healthier future for all of us across Alabama.

Paid parental leave is growing across the South

Since 2020, Florida, Georgia and Tennessee have implemented paid parental leave for new groups of public-sector workers. After enactment, Georgia doubled its initial parental leave duration. Municipalities, too, are beginning to recognize the benefits of paid leave for workers. Birmingham implemented 12-week paid parental leave coverage for its city employees in 2023.

These steps forward contribute greatly to better quality of life for the workers covered by the new policies. Paid parental leave eases economic stresses for new parents and helps mothers in particular to remain in the workforce.

Beyond the benefits to workers, state agencies also benefit from providing paid parental leave. Workers who have more stable economic situations and feel valued as people are less likely to leave a job. And employee churn is

expensive for agencies. The average cost of replacing a worker is between six and nine months' salary. For technical employees, filling an open position can cost employers double the worker's salary.

Great momentum for paid parental leave in Alabama

Alabama has an opportunity to take the same step forward as many of our neighboring states. Bills to provide parental leave for both state employees and teachers made significant progress in the 2024 legislative session. **Rep. Ginny Shaver, R-Leesburg**, sponsored a bill that passed the House and came one step from Senate passage last year. Shaver will file the bill again in 2025. As introduced, this bill would provide eight weeks of paid parental leave for state employees, covering childbirth and adoption.

Sen. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile, sponsored a bill to provide 12 weeks of paid leave for teachers in 2024. This bill won Senate committee approval, and it was combined with the state employees' bill on the Senate floor before time ran out on the last day of the session to iron out details and secure passage. Covering teachers is important with regard to retention because better compensation policies can overcome some of the factors that contribute to teachers leaving the profession.

Best practices for paid parental leave in Alabama

Alabama has an opportunity to implement a paid leave policy that will lead the South. A first-class parental leave policy should meet these standards to ensure the highest benefit to both

workers' quality of life and agencies' retention rates:

- **Sufficient duration.** At least 12 weeks of parental leave at full replacement rate should be available to workers.
- **Broad coverage.** Both parents should be covered to support bonding and recovery of both mothers and infants.
- **Flexibility.** Workers should be able to use parental leave at a time they decide would best benefit their families in the first year of a child's life.
- **Inclusivity.** Workers should be able to use parental leave for adoptions, childbirth, long-term foster care and new family caregiving duties.
- **Availability after adverse outcomes.** Leave should be available in case of a child's death during the first year or of a miscarriage after the first trimester.

Bottom line

Like any employer, our state should ensure its workers have jobs that support their ability to care for their families. The teachers, social workers and many other state employees who help look after our children and who build up Alabama for all the families in the state should be able to create and grow their own families without scrambling to pay the bills.

Paid parental leave is a common-sense policy that helps workers care for their families while maintaining their careers and financial well-being. State officials often have said Alabama is pro-family. Ensuring that teachers and state employees have paid parental leave is an important step to prove it.