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PRESS RELEASE

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Bills that Value Family Ties Await Governor's Okay

*New report calls for family values at work and
national poll shows support for paid time to care*

Berkeley, CA – Three bills that address important family leave issues await Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's approval even as a new report released today by a network of state coalitions calls for new minimum standards on family-friendly workplaces. Significantly, the report *Family Values at Work – It's About Time!* coincides with the release of a nationwide poll of frequent voters showing strong support across party lines and geographical regions for two such policies – paid sick days and family leave insurance.

Currently, California's family leave laws do not recognize the multitude of familial arrangements in the state's diverse population – the result is that many otherwise eligible employees are not able to take leave from work or receive partial pay to care for these family members. California workers need laws that help them balance work and family without losing their job, pay and/or being discriminated against for their family responsibilities.

Passed in 2002, California's groundbreaking Paid Family Leave (PFL) insurance program entitles workers who participate in the State Disability Insurance (SDI) program get a maximum of six weeks of partial pay each year while taking time off from work to care for a seriously ill child, parent, spouse, registered domestic partner, or to bond with a new child.

SB727 (Senator Kuehl) – builds on the PFL program to add grandparents, grandchildren, siblings and in-laws to the list of relatives that Californians can care for without losing pay.

AB537 will allow workers to take 12 weeks of unpaid job protected leave to care for the same workers listed above, in addition to adult children. Authored by Assemblyman Swanson, this bill amends the California Family Rights Act which allows 12 weeks of unpaid job protected leave to eligible workers. AB 537 also clarifies that under the CFRA, employees have the same rights to care for a seriously ill domestic partner as they do to care for a seriously ill spouse. At least 19 states have family leave laws that are more generous than the federal law, and AB537 will bring California in law with this growing trend.

SB 836 (Senator Kuehl) adds familial status to the list of prohibited bases for employment discrimination in the Fair Employment and Housing Act. Recent studies show that employees who care for a family member, such as a child or an aging parent, are more often passed over for promotion, denied leave, or forced out of their jobs, and in some cases even told by their employers that their familial status was the reason for an adverse employment action.

[More...]

While Governor Schwarzenegger decides the fate of these important bills, the *Family Values at Work* report issued by the MultiState Working Families Consortium in conjunction with ten national organizations, points out that nearly two-thirds of all American workers under age 60 will have responsibilities to care for an elderly relative in the next ten years. The report also notes a huge jump in the percentage of mothers with children in the United States who were employed or looking for a job (from 12 percent in 1950 to 63 percent in the 2000 census).

Funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the report highlights how our workplaces fail to respond to today's family's needs:

- Half the workforce – and three-quarters of low-wage workers – does not have a single paid sick day.
- Seven out of ten workers are not entitled to paid sick days to care for an ill child or family member.
- More than half of private sector workers are not covered by the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that only provides unpaid family leave for workers at companies of 50 or more employees.

“Workplace policies haven’t responded adequately to these dramatic shifts,” says Ellen Bravo, coordinator of the Consortium. “In the United States of America, you shouldn’t have to risk your job to take care of your family, and you shouldn’t have to put your family at risk just to do your job. Yet as this report details, millions of workers face this terrible predicament every day.”

The report lays out a policy agenda that includes a minimum number of paid sick days for routine illnesses as well as a family leave insurance fund to provide income during longer-term leaves for a new baby or serious health condition.

Concurrent with the report, a new poll conducted by Lake Research Partners finds that nearly nine in ten poll respondents (89 percent) favor paid sick days. There is strong bipartisan agreement, with at least three quarters of Democrats, Independents and Republicans expressing agreement (Democrats - 94 percent agree; Independents - 90 percent; Republicans - 83 percent).

Similarly, three-quarters of poll respondents favor family leave insurance. Support here is also bipartisan (Democrats - 81 percent, Independents - 73 percent, and Republicans - 69 percent).

In addition to the MultiState Consortium, the following groups are participating in the release of Family Values at Work: ACORN, AFL-CIO; A Better Balance; Center for Law and Social Policy; Moms Rising; The National Partnership for Women and Families; 9to5, National Association of Working Women; National Employment Law Project; Service Employees International Union; and Take Care Net.

*The **Labor Project for Working Families** is a national nonprofit advocacy and policy organization providing education, resources and technical assistance to unions on family issues in the workplace. For the latest news, publications and resources on work/family issues visit www.working-families.org.*