

Labor Project *for* Working Families

Partnering
with unions to
put families first.

PRESS RELEASE

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ADVOCATES HAIL 3-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF NATION'S FIRST PAID FAMILY LEAVE PROGRAM

*More than 400,000 individuals have received benefits since 2004
New legislation would expand coverage for family caregivers*

California continues to lead the nation in providing Paid Family Leave to new parents and caregivers, as the Paid Family Leave program, administered by the California Employment Development Department (EDD) passes its third year mark. This year more than 160,000 parents and caregivers have filed claims for benefits to care for a new child or ill family member.

Paid Family Leave, in effect since July 1, 2004, extends partial wage replacement benefits (55% of salary up to a maximum of \$882 per week) to covered employees who take time off to provide care for a seriously ill child, parent, spouse, registered domestic partner, or to bond with a new child. For most workers in California, the program provides up to six weeks of benefits each year. It is funded through deductions from employees' paychecks.

"I don't get vacation or sick pay in my job as a cabinet maker," said Eric Schmebelt, a father from Napa County, "so Paid Family Leave was the only way I could afford take time off work to be with our new baby and support my wife. My employer is small and didn't realize Paid Family Leave is available, but I found out about it on my own."

Advocates state that Paid Family Leave has been a tremendous success. Despite limited outreach efforts, awareness of the program and number of applicants are steadily increasing.

State Senator Sheila Kuehl, author of the 2004 legislation introducing Paid Family Leave, celebrated the success of Paid Family Leave, but pointed out that significant family members – siblings, grandparents, grandchildren and in-laws – are excluded from the benefits of the existing law. SB 727, authored by Kuehl and currently being considered in the Assembly, would address this shortcoming.

[More...]

Over the two-year period in which Paid Family Leave data from the Employment Development Department has been collected and reviewed, about 10 percent of the care claims that were denied were filed for individuals who were not included in the program's definition of a family member. Most of these denied claims were filed for siblings (35 percent), followed by grandparents (19 percent) and mothers- and fathers-in-law (10 percent).

Meanwhile, more fathers are celebrating the fact that they are no longer forced to choose between caring for their family members and their income. The number of fathers applying for Paid Family Leave jumped in the second and third year of the program.

"It can be really stressful to juggle work and family. This is not taking advantage of the employer – it's entirely employee-paid," said Schmebelt.

Information on how to apply is available at www.edd.ca.gov.

*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, information, publications and resources on work and family issues visit our NEW and enriched website: www.working-families.org.