

Family-Friendly Workplaces:



Do Unions Make a Difference?

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyzes the “union difference” in family-friendly workplace policies. It reviews studies that compare union workplaces with nonunion workplaces to determine whether there is a difference in the extent to which these workplaces implement policies that acknowledge their employees’ family responsibilities and promote a healthy and viable balance between work life and home life. Family-friendly policies are becoming increasingly important as more and more U.S. households find themselves with all adult household members working while they also have child-care and elder-care responsibilities.

The report finds that in most areas unionized workers receive more generous family-friendly benefits than their nonunionized counterparts. The report’s main findings include the following:

- ▮ **Family and Medical Leave Act:** Unionization promotes compliance with the Family and Medical Leave Act. Unionized employees are more likely to have heard of the FMLA and have fewer worries about taking leave. Companies with *any* unionized employees are 1.7 times as likely to comply with the FMLA as companies without any unionized employees
- ▮ **Access to Paid Leave:** Unionized workers are more likely to receive fully paid and partially paid family leaves. Comparing hourly workers who take leave, 46 percent of unionized workers compared to 29 percent of nonunionized workers receive full pay while on leave.
- ▮ **Flexible Paid Sick Days:** Unionized workers are 1.3 times as likely as nonunionized workers to be allowed to use their own sick time to care for a sick child, and they are 50 percent more likely than nonunionized workers to have paid personal leave that can be used to care for sick children. Private-sector unionized workers are 10 percent more likely than nonunionized workers to have “illness leave,” a measure that includes a combination of paid vacation, paid sick leave, paid family leave, and paid personal leave.
- ▮ **Family-Friendly Health-Care Benefits:** Companies with 30 percent or more unionized workers are five times as likely as companies with no unionized workers to pay the entire family health insurance premium. Even when unionized employees are required to pay part of their family insurance premium, they pay a much lower share of the premium than nonunionized workers do—13 percent of the premium compared to 32 percent.

- r ***Flexible Work Arrangements:*** Flexible work arrangements include job-sharing, part-time work, compressed workweeks, working from home, returning to work gradually after family leave, and atypical schedules. There does not appear to be a union advantage when it comes to flexible workplace policies. In fact, the few studies of this issue that have been done show a negative relationship between unionization and flexible work arrangements. This may be because many types of flexibility are not an option for some occupations: for example, telecommuting for factory workers, or daily change of start time for nurses. Or it may be that flextime for some union workers and unions has a negative connotation in that it could mean employers have the flexibility to require unscheduled, mandatory overtime and shift work. More research is needed that examines the union-nonunion difference in flexible work arrangements within job classes and categories.

- r ***Child-Care Benefits:*** In the private sector, 19 percent of unionized workers compared to 10 percent of nonunionized workers receive child-care resource and referral services from their employers. Additionally, 37 percent of private-sector unionized workers compared to 31 percent of private-sector nonunionized workers have dependent care reimbursement accounts, in which part of their salary is set aside each month on a pre-tax basis to pay for eligible child-care expenses.

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Labor Project for Working Families

Founded in 1992, the Labor Project for Working Families is a national non-profit organization that educates and empowers unions to organize, bargain, and advocate for family friendly workplaces. The Labor Project builds broad based coalitions that unite labor, community, and advocacy groups to advance policies that put families first.