



AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, AFL-CIO

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June 16, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi:

The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), AFL-CIO, representing more than 600,000 federal and District of Columbia employees across the country strongly supports H.R. 5781, the Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2008. AFGE commends the leadership of Representative Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) for introducing this bill, which would extend paid parental leave to all Executive and Legislative Branch federal employees, providing an opportunity for parents to bond with newborn infants or newly adopted children and setting an example for private sector employers.

Despite the protections of the Family and Medical Leave Act, federal workers are among those who must choose between a paycheck and meeting their family obligations because they currently have no paid parental leave. Under current law, no part of the leave under FMLA is guaranteed to be "paid leave", a fact that effectively prevents many workers from using FMLA leave at all. H.R. 5781 would change this to provide income support for up to 4 weeks of parental leave.

Opposition to the paid parental leave bill based on concerns about fiscal prudence and affordability is misguided. While there are questions about the costs of extending this benefit to new parents, we do know that productivity is lost when a parent returns to work before they have found proper day-care for a newborn or newly adopted child, or when a federal employee comes to work when she is ill because she used up all of her sick leave when she adopted her child eight months ago. Perhaps a better cost projection is the cost to the federal government when a good worker, trained at taxpayer expense, decides to leave federal service for another employer who does offer paid parental leave.

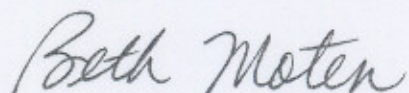
Virtually all research on child development and family stability supports the notion that parent-infant bonding during the earliest months of life is crucial. Children who form strong emotional bonds or "attachment" with their parents are most likely to do well in school, have positive relations with others, and enjoy good health throughout their lifetimes. Spending time with a newborn or a newly adopted child shouldn't be viewed as a personal choice, or a luxury that only the rich should be able to afford.



H.R. 5781 takes as a given that all parents—male, female and adoptive--deserve equal treatment. Others have proposed creating employer-financed short-term disability insurance as a means of providing paid maternity leave for birth mothers. This is not a solution because it discriminates against new fathers and adoptive mothers. These distinctions are mostly irrelevant when the question is whether the worker should be able to continue to receive his or her salary during leave taken solely to care for a new family member.

The time has come for the federal government to set the standard for U.S. employers on paid parental leave. It is clear that left to their own discretion, employers will not extend this crucial benefit to their employees unless their competitors or the law requires it of them. The benefits to children and families of four weeks of paid parental leave are enormous and long-lasting. AFGE strongly urges Congress to pass the Federal Employee Paid Parental Leave Act of 2008.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beth Moten".

Beth Moten
Legislative and Political Director