

Testimony of
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On behalf of
MomsRising.org

Before the U. S. House
Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

Hearing on
“Balancing Work and Family:
What Policies Best Support American Families?”

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Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee:

I am Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner and I'm here today on behalf of MomsRising.org, a new, fast-growing online grassroots organization that works to promote and advocate for family-friendly policies. Our membership is open to everyone who is a mom, and everyone who has a mom. MomsRising addresses issues that are critically important to wide cross-section of our nation: 82% of women in the United States have children by the time they are forty-four years old; and we all have mothers.

Only a little over a year old, MomsRising already has more than 120,000 members across the United States. And we're growing quickly—at a rate of 500 to 3,000 new members a week. That rapid growth speaks to the fact that we have touched a nerve. Americans are struggling to balance work and family, and they want to see policy makers put laws in place that will let them fulfill their responsibilities at work without giving short shrift to their families. This is crucial, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because in order to have a healthy economy now, as well as in the future, we must also have healthy families.

Why are these issues pressing right now? Our nation has changed over the past several decades, but our country's work/family policies have not: Currently a full three-quarters of American mothers are in the labor force. Yet we are stuck with a 1950s support structure. It's time for our policies to catch up to the dynamics of the modern American family.

This is essential because without these policies, American families are in trouble: A full quarter of families with children under six years old live in poverty; and having a baby is a top cause of "poverty spells" in this country--a time when a family's income dips below what it needs for basic living expenses like food and rent. Nine million children--one in nine--have no

healthcare coverage at all. And the lack of afterschool care and flexible work options are two of the main reasons that 40,000 kindergarteners are home alone each day after school.

Our country's lack of family-friendly policies also drags down mothers' wages. While women without children make 90 cents to a man's dollar, women with children make only 73 cents to a man's dollar, and single mothers, about 60 cents to a man's dollar.

Countries with family-friendly policies and programs in place--like paid family leave and subsidized child care--don't have wage gaps as wide as we do here. And we are, frankly, behind the rest of the world when it comes to family-friendly policies.

For example, of the 173 countries that were the subject of a study of international workplace policies by Dr. Jody Heymann of Harvard and McGill Universities, there were only four countries that didn't provide some form of paid family leave for new mothers. The four countries that did not – and do not – have some form of paid leave for new mothers are Papua New Guinea, Swaziland, Liberia and the United States.

In fact, we lack many family-friendly programs that citizens of most other industrialized countries take as a given. Programs like universal health care coverage, paid family leave, and a minimum number of paid sick days. Of the 20 most competitive economies in the world, the U.S. is the only one that does not require businesses to provide paid sick days.

These and other critically important family policies are the core of MomsRising's agenda which is spelled out in the word "mother." M for Maternity and Paternity Leave; O for Open Flexible Work; T for Television and other Afterschool Programs; H for Healthcare; E for Excellent Childcare; R for Realistic and Fair Wages.

If we want to say we have family values; then we have to also value families by passing the kinds of policies that have long been championed by groups like the National Partnership

for Women and Families, the National Women's Law Center, the Children's Defense Fund, FamiliesUSA, and 9to5, five of MomsRising's more than 80 aligned organizational partners. Policies like the Healthy Families Act, and the Balancing Act, as well as fully funding and reauthorizing the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); and the Child Care and Development Block Grant.

We, as a nation, are competing in a global economy in which all the other top economies are investing in their children and families while we lag behind. Children, quite literally, are the economic engine of our future; and study after study shows that investing in children and family policies now, saves funds later because of less reliance on government entitlement programs, less severe illnesses, lower infant mortality, fewer grade repetitions, less interaction with the criminal justice system, and the list of areas where costs are saved goes on. It is horribly short-sighted to ignore these pressing national issues.

MomsRising actively and regularly engages members to support family-friendly policies. For example, in February, we sent out an e-outreach asking our members to urge their Members of Congress to support the Healthy Families Act. In less than 48 hours we had generated more than 17,000 emailed letters.

But we do much more than generate emailed letters. MomsRising members have held hundreds of house parties across the country to discuss the issues they care about and to screen *The Motherhood Manifesto* film which delves into the MOTHER agenda. Our offices are overflowing with thousands of decorated baby ONESies that our members have sent us as a show of support for family-friendly policies--and we're getting ready to exhibit those ONESies at forums around the country. MomsRising was instrumental in getting paid family leave passed in

Washington State--making it only the second state to have paid leave, after California. And we're working in New York, New Jersey, Oregon and elsewhere to get similar laws passed.

We'll continue to work with our more than 120,000 members (and growing), who are in every state, to support federal legislation like the Healthy Families Act and the Balancing Act, as well as to support state legislation that makes workplaces more family-friendly, and to speak out and take action on the issues that matter most to families--because when this many people are having the same problems at the same time, we have a national structural issue that needs to be addressed, and not an epidemic of personal failings. It's time to make those changes.

Thank you.