

Testimony of

Joan Blades

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Subcommittee on Workforce Protections

Hearing on

*“The Impact of Women’s Growing Participation in the Workforce: ‘The Shriver Report: A Woman’s Nation Changes Everything’*

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Madam Chairwoman and Members of the Committee:

I am Joan Blades and I am the co-founder of MomsRising.org, a 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: 82.8 million women in the United States have children and we all have mothers.

MomsRising has more than one million members across the United States. Our rapid growth speaks to the fact that we have touched a nerve. As we have found, and the *Shriver Report* points out, Americans---both women and men--- are struggling to balance work and family, and the vast majority 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. Why are these issues pressing right now? Our nation has changed over the past several decades, but our country's work/family policies are stuck with a 1950s support structure. Currently, women make up one-half of the workforce, and women's wages are increasingly important to the support of their families. Nearly 40% of mothers are the primary breadwinners for their families, and an additional 25 percent bring home at least 25% of a family's total earnings. Yet women make 77 cents to a man's dollar, and mothers fare even worse.

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.

Now, work family balance is not just a problem for families who are well off. It is a problem for all women who work, and in many cases hits low-income workers the hardest. Over 40 percent of children under six years old live in low-income and poor families; 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. . And the lack of afterschool care and flexible work options are two of the main reasons that 26 percent of school aged children are home alone each day after school.

Family-friendly programs are critical and are at 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. MomsRising members have shared their health care stories with Congress asking that they make sure to take care of children and families as they craft health care legislation. And when the CDC hoping to avert the spread of H1N1 advised people to stay home from work if they felt ill MomsRising members reminded their elected leaders that almost half of the non-governmental workers in the U.S. have no paid sick days. There are millions of people in this country that cannot afford to lose a day's wages, and in fact some risk losing their job if they stay home sick. They reminded leaders that not only do workers need paid sick days for themselves, they need it so that they can take care of their families. Parents need to be able to stay home and care for sick children. Paid sick days are good for our whole community

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 New Jersey, the third state to pass paid leave. We will continue to work to get similar laws passed in other states and hope that some day soon federal legislation will follow.

We'll continue to work with our members 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.