



Testimony Presented to the  
Senate Democratic Policy Committee  
From Children First  
Dan O'Brien  
Policy Director, Family Economic Stability

January 20, 2026

On behalf of Children First, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding the Small Necessities Leave Act.

Children First is an advocacy organization that fights to improve the lives of children in Pennsylvania by advocating for measures that improve public health and education, and that boost economic opportunity of all families.

Allow me to update this esteemed committee on how Pennsylvania stacks up against other states with respect to adopting policies that help families work their way out of poverty and that prevent families from falling into poverty. There are plenty of active proposals working their way through this legislature, albeit very slowly, that are already in place in other states where the benefits have proven to work. New Jersey, New York, Maryland and Delaware each have prioritized paid leave policies and other family benefits that we know have attracted families to raise their children in those states because their rhetoric about supporting families is backed by policies that do so. Pennsylvania has a tremendous opportunity to catch up with other states providing family-friendly policies around the country.

This legislature spends considerable time debating measures aimed at growing Pennsylvania's economy from energy and AI policies to new laws that streamline permitting and reducing burdensome regulations. But it's simply not possible to grow the state's economy without simultaneously prioritizing the Commonwealth's workforce, especially common-sense policies that make it possible for parents to be employed and care for their children.

As parents, our number one job is to care for our kids. Imagine having to choose between protecting your job and getting your child the medical attention they need. There are many parents throughout Pennsylvania who simply cannot leave work to take their sick kid to the doctor. Not only may they face pressure at work, but even if they have an understanding employer, many workers around Pennsylvania cannot miss out on even the smallest of income they would lose by taking a few hours or a day or two off work to care for their sick kid. God forbid if their child or their aging parent had a serious illness that required even more time.

The Small Necessities Leave Act brings attention to the simple fact that due to the lack of publicly required job protections thousands of parents are put in the untenable position of losing their job or missing important appointments for their children. This measure shines a light on the fact that we live in a world in which there are two working parents in most households. And these parents are very clear about what is reasonable and what's needed for them to be good



parents and good workers. Parents were found in a [recent Bipartisan Policy Center poll conducted by Cygnal](#) that work-life balance and financial strain are the top two challenges facing their families.

Permit me to also point out that families need more than what this bill will provide. They need the workforce protections that guarantee all Pennsylvania workers have ample paid family and medical leave. In fact, [81 percent of Pennsylvania voters, including 67 percent of GOP voters](#), want Pennsylvania lawmakers to make that a reality.

I want to commend everyone on this committee for being a co-sponsor of the Family Care Act. It has the strongest support of any legislation in both the House and Senate with 88 co-sponsors for [HB200](#) and 31 co-sponsors, including the entire Democratic caucus and 8 Senate Republicans, for [SB906](#). When adopted the Family Care Act will establish a paid family and medical leave program for the 4 million Pennsylvania workers who currently don't have these protections through their employer.

According to [a recent KPMG study](#), working parents said paid leave policies are the most critical support employers can provide them. Yet, [only 27 percent of employers offer paid family leave benefits](#) to their workers. Right here in Pennsylvania, large employers with more than 500 employees are likely to offer their workers these benefits because they can afford to do so. By passing paid leave policies, this legislature can make a big play that gives small and medium sized businesses, those who employ the majority of workers in Pennsylvania, an affordable way to also offer family-friendly policies to their employees. Doing so would be a game changer in the pitched battle for talent and retention of good workers. The lack of guaranteed paid leave, affordable child care and schedule flexibility, causes many working parents, especially women, to leave the workforce altogether. Of course, their exit has a damaging effect on our economy.

We have seen that the creation of statewide paid leave programs around the country puts money back into the pockets of working families and keeps people in the workforce. Packaging Sen. Haywood's bill with the paid family and medical leave legislation will demonstrate that legislators in Harrisburg are prioritizing working families, listening to the needs of working parents, and tackling the affordability and workforce crises. This is what Pennsylvania families need. States like Massachusetts have done both. Pennsylvania can as well.

Given the strong bipartisan support for these family-friendly workplace measures in the Pennsylvania House and Senate, we look forward to working with all members to make the case that leaders on both sides of the aisle must prioritize these measures and pass them this year. Without action, Pennsylvania parents will continue to have to choose between the immediate health of their children and the long-term financial stability of their household. Without action, parents will miss important life milestones their kids may achieve at school. Moments that make a lifelong impact on kids. With action, by passing family-friendly policies, the General Assembly has an opportunity to create a stronger, healthier, more sustainable workforce that will attract young families to Pennsylvania and strengthen our economy in the long-term. Thank you.