

A Work-Family Agenda for New England & The Nation



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balance*
the work and family legal center



national partnership
for women & families

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A Better Balance: The Work & Family Legal Center is a national legal advocacy organization dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace and helping workers to care for their families without risking their economic security. Through legislative advocacy, litigation, public education and technical assistance to state and local campaigns, A Better Balance is committed to advancing the policy recommendations that are set forth in this report.

Family Values @ Work is a network of 15 state coalitions working for paid sick days, family leave insurance and other policies that value families at work. In each state, FV@W brings together broad and diverse coalitions to educate the public and lay the basis for long-term change.

The National Partnership for Women & Families is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy group dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace, access to quality health care and policies that help women and men meet the dual demands of work and family. The National Partnership leads the federal work-family coalition and provides strategic guidance and technical assistance to state and local work-family campaigns.

The New England Region

The States:

Maine
New Hampshire
Vermont
Massachusetts
Rhode Island
Connecticut

The New England Work-Family Regional Policy Summit Participants:

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Tracy Allen	Honorable Mary Gile	Nancy Lynch	Anne Sheldon
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The Problem

The American workplace has not kept up with the changing nature of the American workforce.

Over the last 50 years, women have become half of all workers on U.S. payrolls, and most children today are growing up in a family where both partners work more than 40 hours per week.

Few families can rely on a stay-at-home parent to care for a child who is sick or needs care, or tend to an elderly relative who needs help.

Yet our laws and our business arrangements are tailored to an America where two-parent households predominated and women did not work outside the home. Although the United States exceeds all other industrialized countries in average number of hours worked per worker, it lags far behind other industrialized countries — and even many developing countries — in public policies that support working families. Our single national work-family law, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), provides only unpaid family leave. Millions of workers are not covered by the FMLA at all and many cannot afford to take the unpaid leave the law provides. At the same time, nearly four out of ten private sector workers (38%) do not have a single paid sick day for short-term illnesses; the need is particularly pressing for low-income workers, who must often choose between taking a day off to care for a sick child and losing a job. Moreover, unpredictable work schedules, poor quality part-time work and a rise in discrimination against pregnant women and caregivers make it increasingly difficult for workers to care for their families without risking their economic security.

The result is a genuine care crisis in America characterized by pressure on working families that leads to economic insecurity, particularly for working women.

An underlying reason for the problem is the fact that the labor of caring for others is undervalued both economically and in our public policies. As a country, we treat the work of caring for children, older persons and the sick or disabled as secondary to other forms of labor. We also believe that when families need to provide care for their children or elderly relatives it is an individual problem that society has no responsibility to help address. As a result, the work of caregiving is most often poorly compensated or completely unpaid; we expect caregiving to take place in the gaps of our “leisure” time, rather than recognizing that it is central to most families’ lives. And many employers and others are hostile to public policies that would help create a baseline expectation that workers should be able to take time off to care for their families, and that jobs should offer flexibility to deal with short-term caregiving crises or the long-term needs of the worker.





In March 2010, President Obama convened the first-ever White House Forum on Workplace Flexibility to discuss these challenges and recognize the need for better policies to address the work-family conflict. The President made clear that workplace flexibility is not just a women's issue — it affects women and men, parents and aging workers. According to President Obama, workplace flexibility has become “. . . an issue that affects the well-being of our families and the success of our businesses. It affects the strength of our economy — whether we'll create the workplaces and jobs of the future we need to compete in today's global economy.”

(Executive Office of the President, 2010)

We need to recognize that policies that support caregiving are good for all Americans. This is true for parents and those caring for elderly or disabled relatives. It is also true for those who care about public health, as there are clear health benefits to allowing sick workers to stay home, allowing parents to stay home with sick children rather than sending them to school, and allowing mothers and fathers to have a critical period at home with a new child to ensure bonding as well as to encourage mothers to breast feed. At the same time, research demonstrates that flexible workplaces and reasonable time off policies can lead to better worker productivity, creating a win-win for business. The fact that the United States is alone in the industrialized world in failing to address work-family issues in national policy is an indication that better policies will not hurt our “competitive edge.”

Across the country, there is a growing recognition that family-friendly policies are not simply a “perk” for women but a necessary policy agenda for all workers and their families.

Policies and practices aimed at addressing the work-family conflict will benefit workers, families and the health of the U.S. economy. These are not private problems to be solved individually, but rather matters of public concern requiring systemic solutions. At the national level, the White House has expressed its support for change. The Administration has endorsed the Healthy Families Act, a federal bill which would provide most workers the ability to earn paid sick days, and proposed a State Paid Leave Fund to build momentum for state paid leave programs. In March 2010, President Obama convened the first-ever White House Forum on Workplace Flexibility to discuss these challenges and recognize the need for better policies to address the work-family conflict. The President made clear that workplace flexibility is not just a women's issue — it affects women and men, parents and aging workers. According to President Obama, workplace flexibility has become “. . . an issue that affects the well-being of our families and the success of our businesses. It affects the strength of our economy — whether we'll create the workplaces and jobs of the future we need to compete in today's global economy.” (Executive Office of the President, 2010).

The Idea Behind a Regional Strategy

Despite the obvious need for a national policy that will support workers in their need to care for their families, it has been almost twenty years since a federal law (the FMLA) was passed to provide some protection for workers with an urgent need for time off for their families. Movement of law at the federal level that will apply to the entire country is difficult. Innovative economic and social justice initiatives almost always begin at the state and local levels. This was true of minimum wage laws, occupational health laws, regulation of overtime work, child labor laws and even guaranteed family leave (the first laws offering unpaid family leave were enacted at the state level before being passed by the U.S. Congress). Today, states and localities are on the front lines of efforts to win family-friendly policies like paid family leave, paid sick days and laws against discrimination, as well as encouragement of flexible work policies.

The idea behind a regional strategy is that certain areas of the country share geographic, political and economic qualities and share media markets so that a coordinated strategy makes sense. New England is on the cutting edge of efforts to improve work-family policies with almost every state at some point in the last few years proposing paid sick days or paid family leave legislation, or both. Indeed, Connecticut recently became the first state in the nation to pass a statewide paid sick days law. It is clear that to move paid sick days and paid family leave forward it will take strong coalitions and a groundswell of support that convinces lawmakers these policies are not just the right thing to do but the right political choice because of their popularity among voters. A regional strategy can help make the case.

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Provide Paid Sick Days

Although it often comes as a surprise to people who can stay home when they are sick, almost four out of ten private sector employees — and nearly 70% of low-wage workers — in the United States do not have paid sick time. Beyond workers whose jobs provide no paid sick days for any workers, a new analysis by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) shows that millions of additional workers are not on the job long enough to have access to paid sick time, adding up to a total of 44 million workers in the United States who had no access to paid sick days in 2010 (IWPR 2011). The New England region is no different from the rest of the country: in Connecticut, until the recent passage of the state's paid sick days law, 37% of private sector workers lacked access to paid sick days; the same percentage lacked paid sick days coverage in New Hampshire; in Maine 39% of the private sector workforce lacked paid sick days; in Massachusetts 36% of private sector workers are without paid sick time; and in Rhode Island and Vermont it is 38% (IWPR 2011). Even among the private sector workers who do have paid sick time, many cannot use that sick leave to care for a sick child. Workers also fear job loss. During the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, government officials advised American workers to stay home and keep their children home when sick, but without paid sick time, millions could not heed this advice.

Forcing families to make impossible choices between their jobs and care of their families has significant public health consequences.

Adults without paid sick days are 1.5 times more likely than adults with paid sick days to report going to work with a contagious illness. Workers with jobs that require contact with the public are among those least likely to have paid sick time. For example, more than three in four food service and hotel workers (78%) do not have a single paid sick day, and workers in child care centers and nursing homes overwhelmingly lack paid sick days (National Partnership for Women & Families 2010).

The benefits of paid sick days are clear. According to numerous studies, providing paid sick days would save employers money by reducing turnover and increasing loyalty and productivity. Providing paid sick days would also save our economy \$180 billion a year due to increased productivity and reduced turnover (Levin-Epstein 2005).

Support for paid sick days across the country, and in the New England region in particular, is strong.

For example, in a Vermont poll conducted for Voices for Vermont Children, 88% of respondents felt that companies should offer paid sick leave, and 77% supported legislation mandating a minimum number of paid sick days (Vermont Commission on Women 2009).

Three cities including San Francisco, Washington DC, and Milwaukee have already passed laws providing access to paid sick days to workers in their cities (Chapter 12W of the Administrative Code of San Francisco; D.C. Code §§ 32-131.01-.17; Milwaukee Code of Ordinances § 112). Every New England state had pending paid sick days proposals in 2010, and the paid sick days bill was re-introduced and passed in Connecticut in Spring, 2011; in Massachusetts and Vermont bills were also re-introduced in 2011. Paid sick leave has overwhelming public support that can translate into electoral wins. In the Connecticut governor's race last year, paid sick days was an issue that helped win the primary for Malloy, the candidate who supported the issue. He continued to support paid sick days in the general election and on the job as governor. In addition, although the legal feasibility needs to be assessed in each state, localities in some states may be able to pass paid sick days laws through ballot initiatives.



Expand Paid & Unpaid Family Leave

The Family and Medical Leave Act (“FMLA”), enacted in 1993, is the only federal law that helps workers meet the conflicting demands of work and family (29 U.S.C. §§ 2601–2654). It guarantees eligible employees unpaid job-protected leave for up to 12 weeks to recover from their own serious illness, to bond with and care for their newborn or adopted child, or to care for a seriously ill family member. Although this was a major step forward twenty years ago, there are serious limitations to the law. Because leave guaranteed by the FMLA is unpaid, many workers who are eligible to take time off and need the time cannot afford to take it. There are also eligibility restrictions in the FMLA that lessen its effectiveness. The federal law does not apply to workers whose employers have fewer than 50 employees. In addition, the law requires eligible employees to work for an employer for at least a year before taking FMLA leave and to have worked at least 1,250 hours in the year before they take their leave.

Because of these restrictions, half of all U.S. workers are not covered by the FMLA.

Guaranteeing job-protected paid family leave is the logical next step after the FMLA in supporting workers who need time to care for their families. Paid leave ensures that workers can care for a new child in the family, address their own serious health condition or care for a seriously ill family member without jeopardizing their economic security. Paid leave also improves working families’ health. For example, it has significant positive effects on the health and well-being of young children (Gomby & Pei 2009). Paid leave also allows seniors and the chronically ill to recover more quickly and to stay out of nursing homes.

Paid family leave is also an effective business strategy. Progressive businesses understand that providing paid leave is good for the bottom line. For example, research confirms that first-time mothers with access to paid leave are more likely to return to work after the birth of a child, reducing high turnover costs (Boushey 2008). In addition, businesses benefit from a more productive, loyal workforce.

The New England region has recognized the importance of paid family leave with proposals in many of the states in the region to institute a paid family leave program. Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont have considered paid family leave legislation.

In addition to enacting paid family leave, states can increase the number of employees eligible for FMLA protection by enacting their own job protection laws that expand FMLA definitions. The New England region is a leader in expanding FMLA coverage. For example, in Maine, all private employers with 15 or more employees are covered by the state family leave statute (26 Me. Rev. Stat. Ann. tit. 26, §843). In Vermont, the law covers employers with 10 employees or more for medical leave and 15 employees or more for parental leave (Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 21, §471).

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Promote Fair & Predictable Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements are critical for workers struggling to meet the dual demands of work and life.

Long work hours and rigid work schedules are wreaking havoc on the health and well-being of American families. Overwhelming data has shown that workplace flexibility is a crucial tool, helping workers succeed at work while allowing them to meet their personal and family caregiving responsibilities (Sloan Center on Aging & Work 2011).

In today's globally competitive economy, flexibility is also a powerful tool to recruit and retain top talent, reduce turnover and enhance productivity.

(Sloan Center on Aging & Work 2011). In March 2010, the President's Council of Economic Advisors issued a report exploring these benefits in depth (Council of Economic Advisors 2010).

Although workplace flexibility is a win-win for employers and employees, less than a third of full-time workers report having access to flexible work arrangements (Council of Economic Advisors 2010). Furthermore, according to a 2009 study, "40.6% of the respondents felt that there might be negative career consequences associated with the use of flexible work options" (Pitt-Catsouphes, et al. 2009).

An increasing number of organizations are responding. Many progressive businesses are committing to flexibility as a strategic business tool.

The most progressive businesses also recognize that to be effective, they must do more than develop good policies and programs. They must promote flexible work cultures, where workers on flexible schedules feel supported and rewarded. They know that employees who feel they can take advantage of flexible work options without penalty will be more loyal and productive workers.

Federal and state governments are responding too.

At the White House Conference on Workplace Flexibility, Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Chief John Berry announced plans to expand telework and other family-friendly initiatives in the federal workforce. In addition, as states address budget shortfalls, hiring freezes and changing demographics, they have a unique

opportunity to promote workplace flexibility for state workers. State governments are also taking an interest in increasing flexibility for workers. Michigan and Arizona are promoting telework and other family-friendly policies while, at the same time, addressing problems like rising gas prices and traffic congestion (Fetterman, et al. 2008). Legislators and executives in these states recognize that workplace flexibility results in positive outcomes for states, employees and the community at large.

While the bright light has been on telework, there are many other important ways that federal and state governments can and should be leaders when it comes to flexible work arrangements.

One way that has proven successful in many European countries is for the government to create a process that allows employees to ask for more flexibility in their schedule without penalty. Such a process would foster a sense that flexible work schedules are not just available to a few select employees, but to all qualified workers. According to a recent analysis, establishing a "right to request" would also help workers who do not want (or cannot work) overtime, who want to place limits on their hours and who need help creating a predictable work schedule (Boushey and O'Leary 2010). Roughly 70 percent of low-income workers, 60 percent of middle-income workers and 40 percent of professional workers cannot choose their starting and stopping times (Boushey and Williams 2010).

On the federal level, the Working Families Flexibility Act, introduced in the 111th Congress, would require businesses to have procedures for requiring flexible work. A bill modeled on this law was introduced in New Hampshire in 2008, but it did not move out of committee.

States can be leaders in promoting flexible work and New England states could promote workplace flexibility by piloting, and ultimately implementing, new flexible work initiatives in state agencies.

States in the region could also consider legislative strategies like the "right to request" flexibility, which would encourage private employers to promote flexible work in their own workforces.

Spotlight on Family-Friendly Businesses in New England

Many businesses in the New England region understand that workplace flexibility is a smart strategy for both meeting employees' needs and gaining financial benefits in today's economy. The following three businesses are leaders in the field of workplace flexibility. Their employee benefits and programs underscore the significant value of flexible work and family-friendly policies.

Hypertherm: Recognizing How Paid Leave Benefits Both Employees and the Bottom Line

The senior leadership team at Hypertherm, a New Hampshire-based company that designs and manufactures plasma cutting systems, recognizes that both workers and the company as a whole benefit from flexible and family-friendly workplace policies. According to Deane Ilukowicz, Hypertherm's Vice President of Human Resources,

"Healthy Associates will drive a company's productivity. If Associates who are not feeling well come in to work and infect others, it could affect entire manufacturing processes."

Moreover, Ilukowicz notes that quality could suffer when workers are distracted by their own health or their relatives' health. Hypertherm Associates receive 10 paid holidays, 2 community service days, and an earned time off bank that grows from 3 to 5 weeks. Due in part to their paid leave benefits, Hypertherm has achieved a lower than industry attrition rate across multiple job families including machinists and other production workers.

The W.S. Badger Company: Creating a Family-Friendly Workplace Culture

The W.S. Badger Company, a business based in Gilsum, New Hampshire, produces organic balms and body care products. The leadership team at W.S. Badger actively strives to create a supportive and family-friendly workplace where employees are comfortable taking advantage of their paid leave benefits. In addition to offering its staff paid vacation time, volunteering hours and holidays, W.S. Badger provides 40 hours of paid health time. Health days may be taken when employees or relatives are sick, or can be used by employees to enhance personal or family health.

W.S. Badger also creates a positive culture by providing an opportunity for employees to bring their babies to work until the children are six months old or able to crawl. The successful "babies-at-work" program, which has included 10 babies since its inception in the fall of 2007, reduces daycare costs and improves the health of participants by supporting breastfeeding, decreasing stress and allowing parent/child bonding. The benefits of the babies-at-work program also extend to the company itself. Betsi McGuigan, a Badger cook and the director of charitable giving, says that the company's babies-at-work opportunity and family-friendly culture enhance employee loyalty, generate teamwork and increase productivity. McGuigan proudly explains that,

"Badger honors personal and family health, allows employees to have balanced lives and fosters connections to the community."

King Arthur Flour: Looking out for its Employees, Customers and Community

King Arthur Flour, an employee-owned company based in Norwich, Vermont, provides flour, specialty ingredients, tools and recipes to American bakers. At King Arthur, the commitment to workplace flexibility can be seen at all levels of the business. Suzanne McDowell, the Vice President of Human Resources, says that

"King Arthur's President/CEO expects and encourages employees to have a robust life outside of work."

The company offers employees between 18 and 28 paid days off a year, 7 paid holidays and up to 40 hours of paid community service time. These policies generate employee loyalty, as reflected in King Arthur's low attrition rate, and cultivate a positive relationship with the community.

King Arthur's managers and senior leaders also emphasize the importance of sending sick workers home. According to McDowell, offering paid time off for illness is the "right thing to do" on multiple levels. She explains that paid sick time is important for employees' well-being, the public health of customers and the financial health of the business.

Strengthen Enforcement of Pregnancy and Caregiver Discrimination Laws; Ensure Equitable Treatment of Part-Time Workers

Despite our nation's civil rights laws, discrimination against pregnant women and caregivers is on the rise. According to a 2010 report by the Center for WorkLife Law, there has been a 400% increase in cases alleging "Family Responsibilities Discrimination" (FRD) over the past decade (Calvert 2010). FRD is a form of employment discrimination that occurs when an employee is unfairly penalized at work because of his or her obligation to provide care for a family member.

Discrimination that prevents pregnant women and caregivers from staying at their jobs or advancing at work is a significant threat to family economic security. When a pregnant woman is fired, she risks losing her health care, and even her house and ability to feed her family. When a new mother back from maternity leave is passed over for promotion because her boss thinks she can't handle the job, her lower base income leads to lower lifetime earnings. Moreover, when a man is denied family leave because of an assumption that caring for children is women's work, his family loses out on much-needed income.

In 2007, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) issued a guidance making it clear that discrimination on the basis of family responsibilities can be unlawful gender discrimination under Title VII or unlawful discrimination on the basis of disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (EEOC 2007). The Guidance states that despite the absence of a law that explicitly protects caregivers from discrimination based on their family responsibilities, there are circumstances under which that discrimination will violate existing legal protections. The EEOC also developed "employer best practices" for workers with caregiving responsibilities. To reduce the chance of EEO violations against caregivers and to remove barriers to equal opportunity, employers may adopt pro-active measures such as developing, disseminating and enforcing a strong EEO policy, training supervisors to detect and prevent FRD, and reviewing criteria for hiring, attendance and promotion to see if they disadvantage employees with family caregiving responsibilities (EEOC 2009).

The EEOC's guidance is very helpful in setting the parameters for what constitutes illegal discrimination against caregivers under existing law. However, laws that directly outlaw caregiver discrimination would send a clearer message that employers should not penalize workers with caregiving responsibilities. Furthermore, despite the existence of laws to protect pregnant women from discrimination, there are wide gaps in our statutory framework and enforcement challenges that could be improved by action at the federal level (Boushey and O'Leary 2010).



The Public Health Case Creating Healthier Workers, Families and Communities

There is a compelling public health rationale for expanding workplace flexibility and other family-friendly policies. Researchers have shown that workplace flexibility is an effective preventative health care measure, as flexible work arrangements decrease employee stress and encourage healthier lifestyles. In addition to improving health outcomes for employees, the benefits of flexibility extend to workers' relatives. For example, flexible policies that encourage breastfeeding improve the health of both newborns and their mothers. When parents have workplace flexibility, their children are less likely to miss medical appointments. Research also indicates that sick children have better vital signs, speedier recoveries and reduced hospital stays when their parents are able to care for them.

Ultimately, flexible work arrangements benefit entire communities. By allowing sick individuals to stay home or seek appropriate medical attention, paid sick leave and flexible scheduling policies prevent the spread of illness in schools, workplaces and other public areas. Workplace flexibility also benefits the community by allowing more workers to care for elderly relatives, a service that improves the health of eldercare recipients, reduces health care costs and eases the burden on nursing homes (A Better Balance, Public Health Case, 2010).

In the New England region, states could strengthen pregnancy discrimination laws and expand public education efforts. For example, New Hampshire is one of only 10 states to provide better protection — either by state law or regulation — than the federal Pregnancy Discrimination Act, by prohibiting termination of employment based on pregnancy where an employer offers no leave or inadequate leave (Boushey and O’Leary 2010). In addition, Connecticut law prohibits employers from requesting or requiring information from applicants or employees related to their familial responsibilities (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 46a-60(9)).

New England states could also consider legislation to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on family responsibilities. Currently, only Alaska and the District of Columbia explicitly protect family caregivers from employment discrimination (Alaska Stat. § 18.80.200; D.C. Code Ann. §§ 2-1201.01-.02). Maine proposed a similar law in the past. Such legislation would raise public awareness of FRD and simplify litigation. It would also send a strong message to employers to address work-family issues proactively.

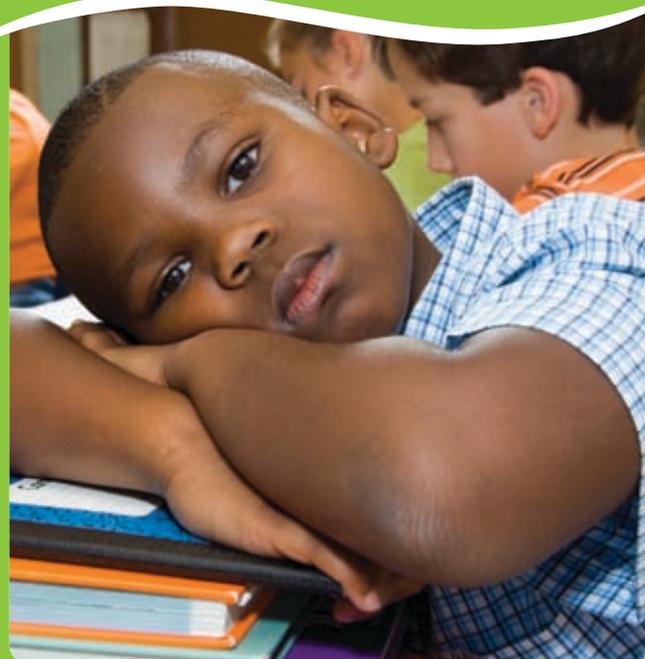
Finally, New England states could strengthen their laws and policies to guarantee the equitable treatment of part-time workers. Outdated laws and policies that penalize part-time workers, many of whom turn to part-time work to balance their work and family responsibilities, jeopardize family economic security. Unfortunately, a recent report issued by the United States Congress Joint Economic Committee (JEC), documents that two-thirds of part-time workers are women, and that part-time workers are paid an average of 58 cents on the dollar compared to the hourly wage of their full-time peers (JEC 2010). Part-time workers are also routinely excluded from federal and state labor laws as well as employer-provided benefit plans. To address this issue, New England states could consider legislation like the European Union Directive on Part-Time Work, which explicitly requires proportional pay and benefits for part-time workers. Short of this type of legislation, states could strengthen existing state anti-discrimination and labor laws (Bakst and Taubman 2011). States could also consider tax credits and other incentives to improve the quality and benefits of part-time work.

The Family Case

Improving Children’s Well-being

Many parents find it difficult to attend school events and parent-teacher meetings due to inflexible work schedules and insufficient time off. Paid leave benefits and access to flexible work policies can provide working parents with more opportunities to support their children’s educational needs. The benefits are clear: greater parental involvement is associated with higher academic achievement, better attendance and fewer disciplinary problems. Several states in the New England region provide employees with family leave to meet their children’s educational needs. In Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont, workers are guaranteed access to unpaid leave to participate in a child’s school activities (Mass. Gen. Laws Ann. ch. 149, §52D; R.I. Gen. Laws §28-48-12; Vt. Stat. Ann. tit. 21, §472a). Additionally, a bill that would provide paid leave for a child’s educational activities was introduced in Massachusetts in January 2011.

Workplace flexibility is especially critical to the well-being of families with special needs children. Studies indicate that working parents with special needs children experience a high level of work-family conflict. Flexible work and other family-friendly programs can help working parents to better meet the health, child care and educational demands of children with special needs. This, in turn, has been shown to improve working caregivers’ productivity and mental health (McGuire, et al. 2010).



Blueprint for a Regional Strategy

1 | **Build a movement together** – share strategies, tools, and resources.

- **Support for trainings and events across state lines.**

Organize joint trainings on substance, on media, on organizing; provide publicity and support for events across state lines.

- **Share information.** Share triumphs and good media that can be distributed to provide support across state lines when mobilizing for a win.
- **Share strategies.** Target opportunities together, e.g. working with swing women voters.

2 | **Build coalitions together.** Strengthen and broaden coalitions by including groups such as faith groups and workers' groups that operate across state lines.

3 | **Work together to engage good businesses to support policy change.** Identify good businesses across state lines, offer visibility for them and engage them in thinking about how to reach out to other businesses.

4 | **Let legislators know this is a regional problem being worked on across state lines.** Create joint briefing books for legislators that include regional as well as statewide facts.

5 | **Work together to increase capacity.** Conduct joint outreach to regional funders and share fundraising strategies.

The Business Case

Improving The Bottom Line

More workers than ever are expressing a desire for flexible work arrangements and family-friendly policies. By providing workplace flexibility, companies can satisfy employees' needs while also improving the bottom line. Flexible work policies can be an effective approach to recruiting talent, increasing employee productivity and reducing absenteeism and turnover.

Studies consistently show that flexible work practices create tangible financial benefits for businesses. For example, it has been estimated that programs allowing workers to telecommute can save businesses as much as \$10,000 per employee each year. Workplace flexibility has also been shown to reduce stress, a leading cause of absenteeism and turnover. Research suggests that employee stress costs U.S. employers as much as \$300 billion a year, or anywhere from \$496 to \$1,984 per employee each year (A Better Balance, Business Case, 2010).



Proposed Solutions to the Work-Family Care Crisis

1 | **Enact legislation to guarantee paid time off for illness and family care, outlaw discrimination against caregivers and support flexible work policies either at the state or local level.** Paid sick days laws that would guarantee all workers a minimal amount of time off each year for their own illness or that of their families have been proposed in every state in the region, and Connecticut has passed statewide legislation making paid sick days a reality for many workers who do not currently have them. Massachusetts has come very close to passing this legislation as well. Because paid sick days legislation has passed in San Francisco, Washington D.C., Milwaukee, and Connecticut, it is clear that a legislative solution to the problem of lack of paid sick days is possible. As a labor, public health, moral and work-family issue, paid sick days legislation is a solution that can bring together supporters from different walks of life and across state lines. Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Vermont have considered paid family leave legislation and movement of those bills could be helped by advocacy encompassing the region as well as individual states. Maine has considered legislation outlawing family responsibilities discrimination and other states could consider such legislation as well. All New England initiatives to date have been at the state level, but local initiatives are also possible in many states in the region. Regional strategies around enacting laws in neighboring states is one way to counter arguments inevitably raised by business that enacting paid sick time, paid family leave or anti-discrimination laws on the state level will lead to the flight of businesses out of the state.

2 | **Convene a regional group of stakeholders to develop an agenda to help relieve work-family pressures.** In New Hampshire, a bipartisan commission that included legislators, businesses, labor groups and women's groups was convened to discuss issues of work-family balance. The result was several legislative proposals that had the backing of a large swath of the New Hampshire community. A similar group could be convened on a regional basis to make proposals to address work-family issues that could be agreed to by stakeholders across the region. This could form the basis for action in the individual states.

3 | **Establish pilot projects to promote flexibility.** At the New England regional conference in November 2010, we heard about the possibility of governments serving as a model on workplace flexibility. States in the region could develop pilot programs to be used by individual states to demonstrate how increased flexible work can be a good thing for both employees and employers.

4 | **Work with supportive businesses.** The good businesses we heard from at the regional conference are key to creating and implementing solutions to the work-family dilemma. These companies, and many others in the New England region, understand the value of creating a flexible and family-friendly workplace culture. Businesses that exhibit best practices and champion workplace flexibility are powerful messengers within the business community. By speaking from experience, these business leaders can explain why workplace flexibility and family-friendly policies benefit employees and help the bottom line. It was clear from the business discussion that to encourage supportive and family-friendly workplace cultures, we must ensure that solutions to the work-family dilemma involve mid-level managers as well as senior business executives. Advocates, government officials and family-friendly businesses can also provide corporate executives with research on the benefits of flexible work. We need to identify additional businesses with good practices and develop ways to recognize their achievements. Working together, we can broaden our regional coalition and create a space for constructive dialogue with the New England business community.

5 | **Build public awareness.** Public education on the importance of work-family issues and the idea that government has a role to play in alleviating the problems faced by workers with caregiving responsibilities is critical to seeing workplace policies change. The pooling of resources across the region to engage in public education through materials, presentations, events and media coverage could make public education efforts more effective.



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For more information

Join others working on these issues and get information from the following organizations:

A Better Balance: The Work and Family Legal Center
www.abetterbalance.org

Alliance of Work/Life Progress
www.awlp.org

Boston Women's Commission
www.cityofboston.gov/women/

BPW Foundation
www.bpwfoundation.org

Cambridge Women's Commission
www.cambridgewomenscommission.org

The Carsey Institute
www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu

Catalyst
www.catalyst.org

Center for Economic and Policy Research
www.cepr.net

Center for Law and Social Policy
www.clasp.org

The Center for Work and Family
www.bc.edu/centers/cwf

Center for WorkLife Law
www.worklifelaw.org

Corporate Voices for Working Families
www.cvworkingfamilies.org

The Families and Work Institute
www.familiesandwork.org

Family Values @ Work
www.familyvaluesatwork.org

Institute for Women's Policy Research
www.iwpr.org

Jobs with Justice
www.jwj.org

The Labor Project for Working Families at Berkeley
www.working-families.org

Main Street Alliance
www.mainstreetalliance.org

Maine Center for Economic Policy
www.mecep.org

Maine Equal Justice Partners
www.mejp.org

Maine Women's Lobby
www.mainewomen.org

Massachusetts Paid Leave Coalition
www.masspaidleave.org

MomsRising
www.momsrising.org

National Association of Women Business Owners
www.nawbo.org

National Domestic Workers Alliance
www.nationaldomesticworkeralliance.org

National Partnership for Women and Families
www.nationalpartnership.org

New America Foundation
www.newamerica.net

New Hampshire Businesses for Social Responsibility
www.nhbsr.org

Ocean State Action
www.oceanstateaction.org

Peace and Justice Center
www.pjcv.org

Progressive States Network
www.progressivestates.org

Sloan Work and Family Research Network
wfnetwork.bc.edu

Office of Somerville Commissions
www.somervillema.gov/departments/health/somerville-commissions

Society for Human Resource Management, We Know Next
www.weknownext.com

Take Back Your Time
www.timeday.org

Vermont Commission on Women
www.women.vermont.gov

Voices for Vermont Children
www.voicesforvtkids.org

Wider Opportunities for Women
www.wowonline.org

Workplace Flexibility 2010
www.workplaceflexibility2010.org



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