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Tennessee Wins U.S. Department of Labor Grant for almost \$200,000 to Study Paid Family Leave System

Advocates Say Study Is First Step for State-wide Program

Nashville, Tenn. –The United States Department of Labor has announced that Tennessee will be one of 8 states/localities to receive a \$193,462 grant from the agency to study the feasibility of implementing a paid family leave program in the state. Tennessee currently has no paid family leave system and there is no federal requirement that employers provide paid leave to workers. In fact, the United States is one of only *three countries in the world* that does not provide paid maternity leave. Only three states – California, Rhode Island, and New Jersey – currently guarantee paid family leave, and nationally, only 13 percent of employees have access to paid family leave through their employer. The grant does not require the recipient to put into place a program, but instead provides the funds necessary to study the issue.

“This is a huge win for Tennessee families,” said Elizabeth Gedmark, Director of the Southern Office of A Better Balance, based in Nashville. “With this federal funding we expect to show what so many struggling families already know from personal experience: paid family leave is necessary to keep middle class workers from falling into poverty. Too many workers in Tennessee, disproportionately low-wage workers, are forced to leave the workforce and depend on public benefits when a family emergency occurs. Tennessee is the only state in the South—in fact, the only state not in New England or the east or west coast—to receive a grant this time. We look forward to Tennessee being a leader on this issue.”

A Better Balance, a national legal advocacy organization with a Southern Office based in Nashville, helped state officials with drafting the grant application and is one of the leaders of a campaign to bring paid family leave to the state and to other states in the Southeastern U.S.

“In recent years we have seen great momentum across the country in support of providing paid family leave so workers do not have to choose between their paychecks and caring for a loved one or welcoming a new child,” said Sherry Leiwant, Co-Founder & Co-President of A Better Balance. “With these grants, we expect this momentum to continue as policymakers receive data showing that paid family leave is not only good for families,



the work and family legal center

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it is critical for balancing budgets and reducing healthcare costs. Tennessee could be next!”

Reports indicate that paid family leave is an important public health issue, allowing family caregivers the income they need to provide for ill loved ones, to recover from childbirth, and establish breastfeeding. It also benefits business by decreasing turnover and increasing productivity.

The U.S. Department of Labor announced the \$1 million grant program to help states, municipalities, and federally recognized tribes conduct feasibility studies for paid leave programs earlier in 2015.

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A Better Balance attorneys are available for interview. A Better Balance is a national legal advocacy organization dedicated to promoting fairness in the workplace and helping workers meet the conflicting demands of work and family.