

STATES LEADING ON LEAVE:

A PLAYBOOK ON WINNING PAID
FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE



INTRODUCTION

No one should have to worry about losing their job for putting their family first during some of the most important moments in life. From the first moments of a child’s life to the last moments in the life of a loved one, we all need time to care for our families, and yet the United States is [one of just six countries in the world that](#) does not guarantee paid leave for workers. Although some workers are eligible for up to [12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#), just [39% of workers](#) are eligible for and can afford to take six weeks of unpaid leave—workers of color, especially Hispanic immigrant workers, are the least likely to be able to access federal FMLA protections.

In the absence of federal action, lawmakers in 13 states and the District of Columbia have enacted legislation establishing a social insurance program that most workers can access to take paid family and medical leave (PFML) to recover from a serious illness, to bond with a new child, or to provide care to a family member with a serious illness.

Momentum for paid family and medical leave legislation has grown rapidly, with eight PFML campaigns celebrating success in the last five years. This publication summarizes some of the lessons learned by the legislative champions and advocates who led the way in ensuring that no one has to choose between caring for their loved ones and the paycheck that their family relies on.



THE BASICS OF PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE

PFML insurance programs vary from state to state but generally cover leave taken by workers for some combination of the following purposes:

- **Medical** leave to recover from a worker's own serious illness;
- **Bonding** leave for parents to bond with a new child, including for foster and adoptive parents and those standing *in loco parentis* to a child;
- **Caregiving** leave to provide care for a family member with a serious illness;
- **Military family** leave to address needs arising from a family member's military service; and
- **Safe** leave to address personal or family needs arising from domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking

In most states with PFML, workers are eligible for at least 12 weeks of benefits for covered purposes, often capped cumulatively for workers requiring multiple types of leave within the same year. Some of the earliest programs for paid leave were implemented by building on the infrastructure of an existing state temporary disability insurance (TDI) program. However, since [only a handful](#)

[of states had preexisting TDI programs](#), in most states, enacting a PFML law is only the beginning of a multi-year process of building administrative infrastructure, collecting payroll deductions, and conducting outreach to employers and employees before benefits can be distributed to workers. Typically, family leave costs are paid for by workers, while medical leave costs are shared between workers and employers.

Eligible workers apply for and receive a weekly benefit amount from the insurance pool that reflects a percentage of their average weekly wages. Most states utilize a progressive wage replacement calculation that ensures that lower-income workers receive a higher percentage of their wages, and in all states, benefits are capped at a maximum weekly rate that is adjusted annually. To ensure that all workers can access the benefits they are entitled to, PFML statutes also generally include provisions that protect workers from being fired or retaliated against by their employer for exercising their rights under the law. Critically, most states also give many workers the right to return to their jobs following a period of leave.

More information on the key elements of PFML policy are available on www.abetterbalance.org

LESSONS LEARNED FOR PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE CHAMPIONS



Delaware Governor John Carney (seated) signs the state's PFML bill into law surrounded by legislators and supporters, including the bill's sponsor, Delaware State Senator Sarah McBride (center-right, in pink)

Courtesy of Liz Richards

This publication shares insights on campaign and strategy decisions gathered from interviews with legislators and advocates in states that have advanced PFML. This resource is intended to support champions who are leading on paid leave in their states in building and winning successful campaigns alongside community advocates and workers, as a complement to a [wealth of existing literature](#) on PFML, from its [many social, health, and economic benefits](#), to resources that assess how proposals can be designed to promote [equitable](#) and [inclusive](#) access, particularly for workers of color and low-wage workers.

The following sections synthesize key themes in coalition building and management, campaign strategy, policy design, and implementation shared in interviews with legislators and advocates in states that have won PFML enactment in Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, and Oregon.

SECTION 1: COALITION BUILDING AND MANAGEMENT

A well-organized coalition is critical to the success of any legislative campaign, and paid leave champions consistently attribute their success to the many strengths that a diverse membership and a values-based approach to governance bring to a coalition.

DIVERSE MEMBERSHIP AND CAPACITY

The passage of PFML legislation was often the culmination of many years of organizing, trust- and relationship-building, and collaboration between lawmakers and coalition members. “The workload for this bill was very heavy, and the amount of information, the amount of conversations that needed to be had were certainly more than one person could handle. You have to have a core group of people who understand what the program is, understand what it does, understand the benefits, and they go out and they talk to people,” said **Minnesota State Senator Alice Mann**. “So I would reach out to coalition members regularly, even daily, to either ask them to talk to more people or to ask them again how the changes we were making as we went along would affect them.”

For **Minnesota State Representative Ruth Richardson**, the diversity of the coalition brought strength to the campaign: “It takes a village to do this work and to do it well. In terms of the coalition that was built in Minnesota, one of the things that I loved about it was the diversity of the coalition because you had the voices of families with their powerful stories that were so important and critical to putting a face on this issue that can seem theoretical. Working with the faith community, labor, community-based nonprofits, those in the disability community, those who were focused on maternal health issues, our seniors—it was such a strong coalition because we were able to really show the breadth and the need for leave across the life span, and I think that was really powerful.”



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Minnesota State Representative
Ruth Richardson

VALUES-BASED GOVERNANCE

The [Time to Care Oregon](#) coalition included over 50 member organizations and had a smaller steering committee that was representative of the entire coalition and tasked with making and executing strategy decisions. “Before we ever got to thinking about how we would draft a specific bill, we wanted there to be an agreement on what the components were,” said **Courtney Veronneau, Senior Political Director at Family Forward Oregon**. “When initially setting the table for a coalition, we’ll discuss and agree on policy principles and values.”

The shared understanding of values and goals within the coalition also extended to legislative sponsors in Oregon. “Lawmakers and advocates each play their own role, but in order for them to do it effectively on their own and in partnership, everyone needs to be working at the same level and have a discussion before a legislative session really takes off about the strategy,” said **Courtney Veronneau, Senior Political Director at Family Forward Oregon**. “It’s really important that advocates and lawmakers also have that discussion and come to an agreement. That’s not to say that everyone’s going to get everything that they want. We had to negotiate a lot to get to the finish line, but there was an understanding and shared agreement on some core things.”

For many legislators and advocates, the practice of developing shared values and principles over the course of years created the critical foundation of trust and relationships necessary to meet the urgent and time-sensitive demands of the legislative session. “One of the things that I’m really thankful for—and I think this is really hard when you’re working with a coalition or any group of advocates—was our ability to maintain trust. The legislature is a really hard place to maintain trust in people and to maintain trust in the process. We were really fortunate to have

a coalition that, at the end of the day, put their trust in us to move the policy forward, to not give too much but to hold strong in the places where it was important to hold strong. That is ultimately what allowed us to get this over the finish line,” said **Maine State Representative Kristen Cloutier**.



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Maine State Representative
Kristen Cloutier



SECTION 2: CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Successful PFML campaigns are often part of a long-term and generative collaboration between lawmakers and advocates to improve the lives of workers in their communities, driven by years of intentional community organizing and thoughtful engagement with all stakeholders.

BUILDING A LONG-TERM PLAN

In many states, the passage of PFML legislation was just one piece of a multi-year and multi-issue vision for a care system and economy that works for all of us won by building power with communities historically marginalized by public policy. “This was work that had been going on well before I even thought about running for office—lots of work and lots of different people are part of this chain that got us to this point of getting paid family and medical leave across the finish line this session,” said **Minnesota State Representative Ruth Richardson**. “One of the very first conversations that I had with members of the coalition was to ensure that we were going to focus on ensuring those who have so often been left out of the safety net were centered within the work. Getting the bill passed, that’s just the first step. And there’s all of this work that needs to happen so that there really truly is equitable access for folks who have historically been left out of this conversation,” Rep. Richardson added.

Paid leave champions often utilize the formal structure and gravitas of a legislative process to work through the complex details of the program alongside stakeholders over the course of several years. Work to develop legislative buy-in began in 2001 when Maine lawmakers established a [legislative study committee](#). Two decades later, **Maine State Senator Mattie Daughtry and State Representative Kristen Cloutier** co-chaired the legislature’s [Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program](#) for three years before the bill finally passed in 2023.

“We started every commission meeting with public comment,” said Sen. Daughtry. “So a lot of the people who were very opposed or very excited about it already had spent three years going through the process with us. They saw their comments get run in simulation models, and we always did our work out in the open.”

PREEMPTING PROGRESS: THE INTERSECTION OF DEMOCRACY AND PAID LEAVE

For many states, advancing PFML in the legislature may be a distant reality that will require long-term organizing and investments over many years. In these states, advocates may wish to consider focusing on state employee paid leave campaigns first. Campaigns to pass statewide or local paid sick leave for short-term medical needs, including preventive care, could be another option.

However, lawmakers in [23 states](#) have enacted laws prohibiting localities from passing their own paid leave laws. Across the country, state lawmakers have increasingly wielded abusive preemption laws to [take power away from people and local communities](#) in ways that disproportionately harm Black workers, women, and low-income workers. In addition to statewide PFML for government employees and repealing anti-worker state preemption laws, community benefit agreements (CBAs) for public works projects with paid leave requirements for government contractors may be another window of opportunity in these circumstances.



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Senior Political Director at
Family Forward Oregon
Courtney Veronneau

The [Time to Care Oregon](#) coalition worked alongside lawmakers to advance policy campaigns that built upon each other. “Paid family and medical leave was actually the second policy in a series of policies that we’ve been working on,” said **Courtney Veronneau, Senior Political Director at Family Forward Oregon**. “It started when we built the campaign and coalition to pass paid sick days in 2015. Then we used that win—that momentum and foundation—to build toward paid family and medical leave.” The same year that Oregon lawmakers finally enacted PFML in 2019, they also established the [Task Force on Access to Quality Affordable Child Care](#). Just three years later, the coalition won a historic \$100 million investment in child care informed by the [recommendations of the task force](#). “Because we really nailed the coalition building and the values and principle setting process, partners knew that we were going to build an effective coalition that was really based in our values and principles and would have good power-sharing practices,” Veronneau added.



Maine State Senator Mattie Daughtry (left) and Maine State Representative Kristen Cloutier (right) speak at a press conference to introduce their PFML bill with coalition members.

Courtesy of Rep. Kristen Cloutier



We have a system that is disproportionately leaving out Black, Latine, Indigenous folks, women, LGBTQ+ communities. I really framed conversations around how we have a system where the people who are most likely to have access to leave are the people who are most able to afford leave on their own, versus all of these folks who don't have access to leave and are a paycheck away from losing everything.

Minnesota State Representative
Ruth Richardson

“RIPPING THE BAND-AID OFF”: THE URGENCY OF CARE IN A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Under the best of circumstances, our nation's lack of accessible paid leave exposes families and communities to health risks and economic precarity, but during a pandemic, the urgent need for care altered the discussion of paid leave in state houses. “The COVID-19 pandemic ripped the Band-Aid off of the charade we had that everything's okay in our country and our state and our communities,” said **Maine State Senator Mattie Daughtry**. “Even the folks who are against paid family and medical leave had lived that experience of everyone needing time off. People seeing it firsthand is what got it across the line.”

Similarly, in Minnesota, the need for time off during the pandemic helped accelerate the window of possibility for passing PFML legislation. “The tone and the tenor around paid family and medical leave on the floor and in the committee changed while I was carrying this bill,” said **Minnesota State Representative Ruth Richardson**. “Instinctively, we all know we need time to care for ourselves, but when you're in the middle of a global pandemic, I think it becomes harder for people on the other side to say, ‘No, no one needs time away.’”

Moreover, passing paid leave legislation in the wake of a pandemic that worsened health and economic disparities for communities of color, immigrant communities, and low-wage workers was an important opportunity to connect the dots between how fundamentally flawed systems that exclude some of us affect all of us. “I spent a lot of time telling the story about the way that safety nets in our country have been built in a way that, oftentimes, people who look like me were left out of those safety nets,” said **Minnesota State Representative Ruth Richardson**. “Being able to trace the historical context of that back, thinking about that for my own ancestors that were enslaved, this whole idea that you're not worthy of rest—that your humanity is not recognized. We have a system that is disproportionately leaving out Black, Latine, Indigenous folks, women, LGBTQ+ communities. I really framed conversations around how we have a system where the people who are most likely to have access to leave are the people who are most able to afford to leave on their own, versus all of these folks who don't have access to leave and are a paycheck away from losing everything.”

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND OUTREACH

For many legislators and advocates, the wide-reaching scope of a new social insurance program meant that gathering public input early and often was critical to the success of PFML campaigns. “It’s hard for the average person to be able to make it to their state capitol,” said **Maine State Senator Mattie Daughtry**. “So we went out on tour. We asked people what they thought and got their feedback. By the time the bill hit the news, people had some sort of experience talking to us or looking into the policy. It made a better piece of legislation. And I think it smooths what is a very rocky road for a bill like it to pass anywhere.”

“People are really not used to being asked for input on legislation. And not only are they not used to being asked, but they’re not used to somebody coming to their community to ask that question,” added **Maine State Representative Kristen Cloutier**. “I think our genuine interest really helped to bring the temperature down a bit in a lot of contentious spaces.”

Similarly, legislators and advocates in Delaware took to the road to bring discussions about PFML to communities. “Once we had a bill and were kind of pushing for it, we did a three-county tour, where we brought a variety of stakeholders to basically have roundtable discussions on it,” said **Delaware Cares Director Liz Richards**. “It was a really great mechanism to learn, but also to organize and create a shared sense of mission and investment. The legislative sponsors were key to that. That was another way to build champions, like giving folks a platform to share their stories, share their support, and get more invested in the issue.”

For **Maryland State Senator Antonio Hayes**, the fight for paid leave was about centering the workers who need paid leave. “My advice to my legislator colleagues is: this is an issue that touches families in a way that’s immeasurable. And so, oftentimes, I would allow the space for



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Maryland State Senator
Antonio Hayes

the affected families to really take the lead and give their testimony as to why this is important to them,” said Sen. Hayes.

At the same time, the bill’s passage was deeply personal to **Maryland State Senator Antonio Hayes**: “At a very early age, my grandmother was my caregiver. Fast forward to today, I’ve shared the responsibility of caregiving for my grandmother, which often called for me to step away from work at times to take care of her. In February 2022, I took a week off to spend time with my newborn son, but then I came back to work to make sure this bill got passed. I had to get back to make sure that other families had that opportunity—if they were having a child, that they could actually step away from work and not suffer the consequences of not being compensated by their employer.”

ENGAGING WITH THE OPPOSITION

Legislators and advocates approached their engagement with opponents, particularly corporate business interests, with an open mind, often over the course of years in ways that smoothed final negotiations ahead of bill passage. “We never said ‘no’ to any request to meet,” said **Maine State Representative Kristen Cloutier**. “You still learn from meetings with opponents. When people see that you’re willing to be uncomfortable in order to listen, it builds trust in the process.”



For any large policy, when you really take the time to sit with someone who’s opposed to it, you might not entirely win them over, but they’re going to leave the conversation knowing that you listened.

Maine State Senator
Mattie Daughtry

As a small business owner, **Maine State Senator Mattie Daughtry** deeply understood the concerns of many business interests about PFML legislation. “I’ve seen firsthand as an employer not only the cost of keeping your doors open, but also how the best investment you have is in your employees, and I’ve actually lost employees because we weren’t able to provide this type of benefit,” said Sen. Daughtry. “For any large policy, when you really take the time to sit with someone who’s opposed to it, you might not entirely win them over, but they’re going to leave the conversation knowing that you listened.”

Paid leave champions also frequently note that opposition often comes from a place of misunderstanding about how PFML programs function as an insurance program and can benefit business owners. “Myself and other co-authors would have one-on-one conversations with people who are on the fence or were opposed to it,” said **Minnesota State Senator Alice Mann**. “But really, a lot of people that were on the fence or were opposed to it didn’t understand what the program was. We talked one-on-one with almost every single person in the legislature to educate them about the incredible, undeniable benefits of paid family and medical leave. And we did the same thing with business communities. We would talk to them, or we would ask business owners to reach out to other business owners to go over the benefits that businesses incur when they participate in the program.”



SECTION 3: POLICY DESIGN

Navigating policy design and the compromises that come out of negotiations that pave the way to passage is challenging in any legislative campaign; when it comes to a policy as complex as establishing and implementing a multimillion-dollar insurance fund, equitable access and solvency can hinge on just a few key decisions.

STARTING WITH A VISION

Both legislators and advocates describe the importance of finding alignment on key policy provisions and setting the expectation that some form of compromise will be necessary early on in the process. “You have to have a vision from the start of where you want this to end up, of how you want this program to look like,” said **Minnesota State Senator Alice Mann**. “That vision is a culmination of what you think is right, what the advocates think is right, and what will actually benefit people. So when you start crafting the bill, make sure that you have that vision in mind and always start above your vision.”

“With the coalition, in the early stages, we weren’t sure what the lines in the sand were for our partners,” said **Maine State Representative Kristen Cloutier**. “Getting to the point where we understood what the lines in the sand were for our partners, we understood what the lines in the sand were for ourselves, and knowing where we could give and where we needed to hold strong was really important.”

“You have to be really upfront that not everyone’s going to get something. It almost sort of felt like a headline that we’d walk into: everyone would get some wins; everyone would get some losses,” said **Maine State Senator Mattie Daughtry**. “And once you made it clear that it wasn’t going to

be ‘my way or the highway,’ I think that really helps. But really building that trust and having the people around you who can be those types of messengers who are not only involved in the policy but understand what the parameters are that have to be kept in check.”



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Minnesota State Senator
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WEIGHING COMPROMISE

With a vision in hand at the outset, legislators and coalitions can begin to weigh where compromise would and would not be acceptable based on shared values and goals. “Inevitably, you will get to a point where you have to negotiate, and I think the big question is likely going to be, ‘Do we cover everyone for less time? Or do we cover less people for more time?’” said **Courtney Veronneau, Senior Political Director at Family Forward Oregon**. “Are you essentially cutting some people out of the program, like part-time workers or low-wage workers? For our coalition—and lawmakers felt the same way—we were all in agreement that we’re going to go with less time off, but we’re going to cover everybody. That’s something you need to figure out before; I think it does make those things a little bit easier when it comes, if you can figure out those types of negotiation bottom lines first. Think about building the foundation for the best possible program you can absolutely get that covers everyone, that gets them the most time that you can get them, and that is set up in a way that people can actually use it.”

Some common compromises, however, are not only counterproductive to ensuring that workers who can least afford to take paid leave will be able to access the new program but can even undermine the solvency of the insurance fund. “There is always going to be an appetite to make an exception,” said **Maryland State Senator Antonio Hayes**. “The key to paid family leave is to have as much participation as possible so the fund can be and remain solvent. We’ve seen many cases throughout the country in states that have allowed certain exemptions allowed certain carve-outs where the fund did not generate enough to support itself as it should. The whole idea behind this is for this insurance policy to be self-sustaining, and you don’t want to compromise in a way that jeopardizes the fidelity of the program.”

A CAUTIONARY TALE: VOLUNTARY PAID LEAVE AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE PAID LEAVE MODELS

The comprehensive programs adopted in 13 states and the District of Columbia are designed to provide access to PFML to all workers, but in recent years, some states have adopted a narrower approach that continues to leave most workers without adequate access. **New Hampshire** lawmakers enacted legislation ([2021 NH HB 2](#)) to provide six weeks of paid family leave to public employees. Under the new law, private employers can voluntarily opt into the program, and workers can choose to purchase their own paid family leave insurance. A [similar approach](#) was adopted through [executive action](#) in **Vermont**.

Legislators in **Virginia** passed a bill ([2022 VA SB 15](#)), based on a [model bill proposed by the insurance industry](#), to allow insurers to sell paid family leave insurance plans that meet certain requirements. **Texas** lawmakers recently enacted similar legislation ([2023 TX HB 1996](#)). This approach provides no guaranteed right to PFML for workers and is billed as a private market solution. However, the private market has not met the incredible demand for PFML nationwide. Moreover, legislation authorizing private insurers to offer voluntary paid family leave insurance policies to employers may not be legally necessary in some states.

Paid leave champions should approach both models with some caution. **New Hampshire** officials [recently announced](#) that only 1% of employers have signed up for the voluntary program, while only 644 individual workers have purchased the insurance. Meanwhile, only one insurer has [sought and received approval](#) to offer paid family leave insurance in **Virginia**.

Delaware State Senator Sarah McBride (center, holding mic) speaks at a roundtable discussion about PFML.

Courtesy of Liz Richards



BUILDING COLLABORATION INTO NEGOTIATIONS

The [Time to Care Oregon](#) coalition would assemble its negotiating team based on which organizations would provide the necessary policy expertise and the power and influence to succeed in the room. “When it came to negotiations where we needed an even smaller

set of folks, essentially we were able to then collaborate as a team to strategize heading into negotiations,” said **Courtney Veronneau, Senior Political Director** at Family Forward Oregon. “We would always have conversations with our legislative champions beforehand; we were always trying to work as much as we could to get on the same page as much as we could. We saw ourselves as having different roles, but when we were headed into that room, we were like part of a team.”



Continuing to talk to people, including the most impacted people, is critical, and frankly, remembering them when they're not there because they can't be there. More often than not, low-wage workers don't have time or aren't even invited into the room.

Delaware Cares Director
Liz Richards

Long before it came to negotiations, the Time to Care Coalition also agreed to an inclusive process for decision-making on key policy provisions. “If there was ever a policy negotiation on a piece that directly impacted a constituency that was not represented in the room but was part of our coalition, we all had a very firm line and an agreement that whoever was in that room was not going to agree to anything before being able to go back and have conversations with that particular constituency,” said **Courtney Veronneau, Senior Political Director at Family Forward Oregon**.

This process was recently tested during the 2023 legislative session when lawmakers were considering [legislation](#) to amend the state’s PFML program, including expanding the [definition of “family member”](#) under the program. “The business lobby wanted to specify what ‘affinity’ meant, and there was a discussion on whether we wanted to specify that in statute or rules, and immediately we wanted [Basic Rights Oregon](#) to know about this and weigh in on definitions and what kind of language would be best,” said **Lisa Kwon, Policy Manager at Family Forward Oregon**.

When it came time for policy negotiations in Delaware, legislators continued to communicate developments with community members. “The willingness, the exercise of listening and continuing to have an open line of honest communication, which I think **Delaware State Senator Sarah McBride** did extremely well, even in communicating tough choices,” said **Delaware Cares Director Liz Richards**. “Continuing to talk to people, including the most impacted people, is critical, and frankly, remembering them when they’re not there because they can’t be there. More often than not, low-wage workers don’t have time or aren’t even invited into the room. It’s really, really hard work to advocate and go to powerful people and beg for things that are owed to you—that takes a lot. Legislators are sent there to fight for the people who aren’t in the room.”



Minnesota State Senator Alice Mann (center-left, in floral) and Minnesota State Representative Ruth Richardson (center-right, in green) celebrate the passage of their PFML bill in the state House with supporters.

Courtesy of Rep. Ruth Richardson

SECTION 4: PLANNING FOR SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Getting PFML legislation signed into law is just the beginning of a multi-year implementation process. Legislators and advocates have a critical role in this process, from working with the administering agency in the regulatory process to educating workers about their new rights.

AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS AND REGULATORY OVERSIGHT

Legislators and advocates alike highlight the importance of maintaining a collaborative effort to engage in the implementation of the new law, particularly to monitor the influence of business interests in the rulemaking process. “One of the challenges that we experienced during implementation was continuing the momentum of the coalition that worked together to pass paid leave,” said **Lisa Kwon, Policy Manager at Family Forward Oregon**.

“Lawmakers shouldn’t underestimate their ability to push back on agencies,” said **Courtney Veronneau, Senior Political Director at Family Forward Oregon**. “It really helps if agencies are hearing from lawmakers in chorus with advocates. It has much more of an impact. You can pass the greatest, most inclusive, amazing bill that you want, but if you do not stick with it through implementation, where so many decisions can be made, that can undermine the intent of what it was that you were trying to pass. So make sure that you really plan that into your work as a lawmaker and into the work plans of your office and your office staff.”

In Maine, lawmakers also established an independent authority to help oversee the implementation and administration of the state’s new PFML program in future years. “We created an independent authority that has Senate confirmation and has a fiduciary duty to the fund so that we have a body beyond the legislature whose sole job it is to keep an eye on this,” said **Maine State Senator Mattie Daughtry**. “We built in all these different safeguards so even if there’s something that comes up, we built in the mechanism for it—we looked at what some other states have had to deal with in terms of solvency and some other issues.”

“All the major decisions when it comes to solvency, fund amount, benefit calculation are consistently linked away from legislators, away from politics, and tied into economic data and ongoing actuary science,” said **Maine State Senator Mattie Daughtry**. “We thought about building the fund to not only protect it from ourselves as a legislature, but also from the economy, and also from proponents or opponents. So it’s a well-guarded economic engine. Not only did we get a great policy, but we built in mechanisms to make it more responsive and be able to adapt and be flexible in itself.”

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

The successful utilization of new PFML programs requires an extensive and thoughtful approach to educating the public about how the new law will affect their lives. “One of the things that I’ve learned since passing the legislation is that our outreach efforts need to be intense. This is a different way of doing business—it’s a culture shift. So, there needs to be some intentionality about reaching people in the community on what the benefit is,” said **Maryland State Senator Antonio Hayes**. “We need not underestimate what that will take and how much that will cost. I have been working with the implementing agency and helping them to understand the intensity and level of outreach that’s going to be needed to make sure that this is successful.”

In the months and years after passage, legislators often face a great deal of confusion about new PFML programs among constituents and businesses alike who have heard about previous versions of the bill or read misinformed media reporting on the bill. “We learned from California that without appropriate outreach the program essentially fails right in their first year, no one knew it existed, and so what we did is we put money aside every year in our bill,” said **Minnesota State Senator Alice Mann**.

“That money is going out to community programs that have ‘boots on the ground’ that can talk to employers and employees about the existence of the program, how to use the program, who qualifies, and how employers can appropriately use the program also.”

“Folks have so many questions about the program, and the rulemaking process hasn’t even started yet, so it’s hard to address some of the concerns being raised,” said **Maine State Representative Kristen Cloutier**. “There were different iterations of the bill that people are responding to. And so we’re having to figure out where their questions are coming from, which iteration of the bill they’re referring to, and answer those questions based upon what they think is factual, which may not actually be included in the law that was passed. That’s been challenging.”

“The other thing for policymakers that I think gets lost in a lot of legislation is to make sure that your authorizing agency has a marketing budget,” said **Maine State Senator Mattie Daughtry**. “Legislators are often quite keen in the budget process to jettison that type of expense, but I think any policy that applies to everyone needs to have posters, easy-to-navigate website, quality design, ensuring that you have the best staff—preferably in-state staff—answering calls and claiming benefits.”



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Minnesota State Senator
Alice Mann

CONCLUSION

Together, state legislators and advocates have led the nation in ensuring that all workers can afford to take time away from work to be with their loved ones during life's most important moments. As paid leave champions look to make paid leave a reality in their own states, they can turn to some of the lessons of recent successful campaigns.

1. Building a diverse and values-aligned coalition of support.

Coalitions are made stronger with a breadth of expertise, capacity, perspectives, and political power among their membership, and by strong working relationships founded upon trust and shared values.

2. Executing a campaign with a vision that extends beyond policy passage.

Successful campaigns take the time to center communities and deep discussions with stakeholders to ensure that each policy win builds to the policy win over the course of a generation.

3. Developing a shared vision for policy while planning for principled compromise.

Legislators and coalitions work together to understand where there is and isn't room for compromise ahead of time and develop a process that prioritizes continued collaboration in the face of time-sensitive negotiations.

4. Planning for continued coordination through implementation and rollout.

Success can only come when policy changes the lives of families and communities; legislators and advocates must continue to collaborate and engage through rulemaking and outreach to ensure that the program achieves the policy's goal.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Lessons Learned from State PFML Campaigns and Programs

- [Getting to Yes: The Makings of Paid Leave in Massachusetts](#), Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy, University of Massachusetts Boston (2022)
- [Implementation of Paid Family Leave in New Jersey: A Promising Work in Progress](#), Center for Women and Work, Rutgers University (2021)
- [Implementing Paid Family and Medical Leave: Lessons for State Administrators from Research in New Jersey](#), New America (2021)
- [Preliminary Lessons from Implementing Paid Family & Medical Leave in Washington](#), Economic Opportunity Institute (2020)
- [The Road to Winning Paid Family and Medical Leave in Washington](#), Economic Opportunity Institute (2017)
- [Lessons from New York: How a Broad Coalition Won the Strongest Paid Family Leave Bill to Date in the U.S.](#), Family Values @ Work and People's Action Institute (2016)
- [A Guide to Implementing Paid Family Leave: Lessons from California](#), Labor Project for Working Families and Berkeley Center for Health, Economic & Family Security (2011)

Policy Design

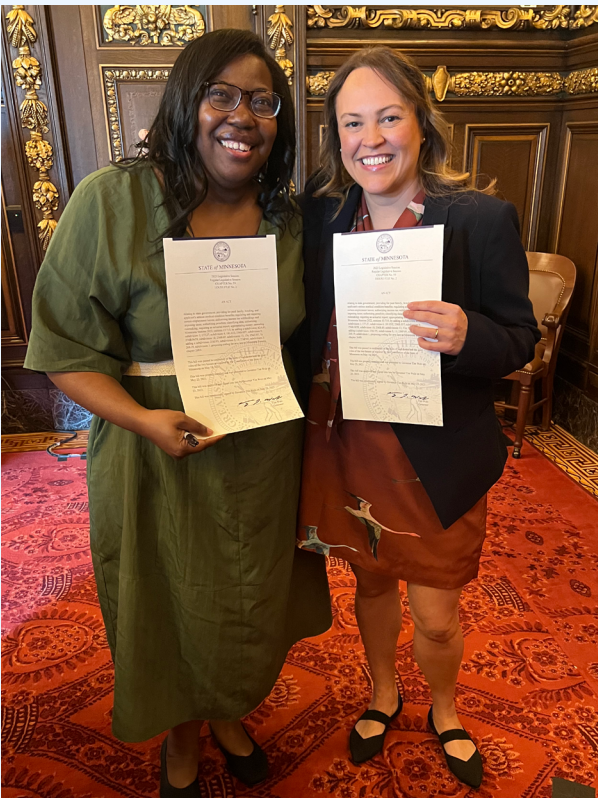
- [Model State Paid Family and Medical Leave Statute](#), A Better Balance and National Partnership for Women & Families (2015)
- [Explainer: Paid Leave Benefits and Funding in the United States](#), New America (2023)
- [Key Components: The Essential Elements of a Strong Paid Family and Medical Leave Law](#), A Better Balance (2022)
- [Equity Matters: Lessons for Paid Family and Medical Leave](#), Center for Law and Social Policy (2021)
- [The Importance of an Inclusive, Realistic Family Definition in Paid Family and Medical Leave and Paid Sick Time Policies](#), A Better Balance and Family Values @ Work (2021)
- [Paid Family + Medical Leave Playbook](#), State Innovation Exchange (2020)

State Paid Family and Medical Leave Laws

- [Comparative Chart of Paid Family and Medical Leave Laws in the United States](#), A Better Balance (2023)
- [State Paid Family & Medical Leave Insurance Laws](#), National Partnership for Women & Families (2022)
- [Paid Leave Program Implementation Timelines](#), A Better Balance (2023)

Research

- [Health, Work, and Care in Rural America](#), New America (2022)
- [Paid Leave Research](#), National Partnership for Women & Families (2023)
- [Paid Leave Works: Evidence from State Programs](#), National Partnership for Women & Families (2022)
- [The Business Case for Paid Family and Medical Leave](#), A Better Balance (2022)



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