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Family Medical Leave is Good for Everyone

Providing employees with expanded family medical leave is good for workers, good for businesses, and good for North Carolina's economy

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is the first and only federal legislation written specifically to help workers meet the dual responsibilities of family and work. FMLA guarantees job-protected, unpaid leave for up to 12 weeks to care for a newborn or newly adopted child; care for a seriously ill child, parent or spouse; or recover from a serious illness. Since its implementation in 1993, FMLA has enabled more than 35 million workers to deal with health issues or family responsibilities without risking their jobs.

But FMLA doesn't go far enough. Today, many workers are responsible for the care of their extended or blended families, and the current law leaves many of them unprotected. **That's why the Caregiver Relief Act (HB 269/SB 337) is essential to today's working families.** This legislation would expand eligibility for FMLA-protected unpaid family and medical leave to include care of siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, stepparents and parents-in-law.

The definition of "family" under the Family and Medical Leave Act is too narrow and does not reflect the realities of North Carolina's families.

- Families rely on grandparents, stepparents, in-laws, and siblings for caregiving.
- There are 1.73 million *family caregivers* in North Carolina providing care to an adult with limitations in daily activities.
- Families provide at least 80% of all care services and more than 100,000 NC grandparents are responsible for their grandchildren.
- North Carolina ranks 6th in the nation in the number of children under age 6 who have a grandparent who provides that child's primary care.
- Yet, care for a sibling, grandparent, grandchild, parent-in-law—anyone other than a child, parent or spouse—is not covered.

Providing expanded family and medical leave makes good sense for businesses.

- Nearly two-thirds of employers say that complying with the FMLA is very easy or somewhat easy, according to a recent survey.
- **Replacing an employee permanently, rather than providing leave, can cost as much as five times the employee's yearly wages**, plus losses in productivity and employee morale. The costs of replacing an employee (advertising for, interviewing and training a new worker) is often far greater than the cost of providing short-term leave to retain existing employees. In a recent cost-benefit analysis of recent federal paid leave proposals, reduced turnover accounted for the majority of the expected savings.
- **Expanding family and medical leave would provide significant savings in reduced turnover.** Mothers who gave birth after the passage of the FMLA were more likely to return to the same employer and took less time away from paid employment than those who gave birth before the FMLA.

Providing expanded family and medical leave is good for workers, good for businesses, and good for the economy. It's time to provide leave for workers and their families.

For more
information,
contact:

Allan Freyer
Workers' Rights
allan@ncjustice.org
or (919) 856-2151

NORTH CAROLINA
JUSTICE CENTER
P.O. Box 28068
Raleigh, NC
27611-8068

(919)856-2570
www.ncjustice.org