



On Press Call, Duckworth Calls for Passage of an Inclusive, National Paid Leave Policy

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— U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) this afternoon spoke about the urgent need to enact a comprehensive national paid leave policy that would support a robust economic recovery and help rebuild the American workforce. U.S. Representative Colin Allred (D-TX-32) and Paid Leave for All director Dawn Huckelbridge also participated in the press call.

Key quotes:

- “And yet while some military families have access to paid leave through state programs or their employer, or parental leave through the military, they may lack access to broader family leave, and the FMLA only provides unpaid leave to those spouses and partners who work for eligible employers.”
- “Clearly, this is one of the best ways to jumpstart our economy. And it’s obvious that our country can’t simply rely on the private market or employers to offer paid leave, and workers can no longer accept existing inequities are the status quo in the workplace.”
- “Passing paid leave is critical to Building Back Better—and it’s essential to making sure we honor our troops in the way they deserve... making our military, our economy and our nation as strong as it can possibly be.”

Duckworth’s full remarks as delivered are below:

- Thank you so much, Dawn. I’m so glad that I get to join you and my good friend Congressman Allred to talk about this very important issue.
- Ever since my six-year-old, Abigail, went back to in-person learning full-time a few months ago, I’ve spent most weekday mornings hustling her out of bed, getting her dressed and her teeth brushed, all the while trying to keep an eye on my three year old and getting myself ready to leave for the Capitol.
- Sometimes everything gets so crazy that I just have Abigail sleep in clothes she can wear to school the next day—usually leggings and a comfy sweatshirt. Working moms gotta do what working moms gotta do.
- But even through all of that and all those stressful mornings, I know I’m one of the lucky ones. I have help. I have a husband and I have my mom, who actually lives with us and is happy to lend a hand. *And* I have the ability to take paid leave if an emergency happens.
- But for far too many parents, that’s simply not a possibility.
- Our country has faced both public health and economic emergencies over this past year, and we’ve seen yet more proof of how these kinds of crises disproportionately

affect women and communities of color... forcing them to make impossible choices between caring for their families and earning a paycheck. For too many parents, it's simply not a possibility to take that paid leave.

- So let's be clear: This was a crisis long before COVID-19 became our reality.
- Even before the pandemic, nearly 80%, think about that, of private-sector workers did not have access to paid family leave through their jobs to care for a new child or a sick loved one.
- And those who *do* have access are largely higher-paid professionals... employees who are more likely to be white, and who, during this crisis, are more likely to be able to work remotely from the safety of their homes.
- Meanwhile just 8% of workers in the bottom 25% of our wage scale had access to paid family leave in 2020. Just 8%.
- Meanwhile, we're also seeing new research conclude that taking action before the end of the pandemic on policies for care and equity could add \$2.4 *trillion*—trillion with a “t”—to the U.S. GDP by 2030. Imagine adding and growing \$2.4 trillion to our GDP, and all we have to do is act on this right away.
- Clearly, this is one of the best ways to jumpstart our economy. And it's obvious that our country can't simply rely on the private market or employers to offer paid leave, and workers can no longer accept existing inequities are the status quo in the workplace.
- Even before COVID-19 happened, workers and their families lost a combined \$22.5 billion in wages each year due to a lack of paid family and medical leave...

A lack of access that also led to higher costs in unemployment, hospitalizations and healthcare, compounding financial loss upon financial loss...

- And all too often, it's some of our nation's most vulnerable families who are paying the highest prices, including our military families and Veterans.
- Just one quick example:
- Employed military spouses inevitably take on the weight of preparing for deployment, managing a household and family during the tour, then juggling their own careers while helping their partners integrate after they return home from war, often having to physically care for them if they were injured while deployed.

- And yet while some military families have access to paid leave through state programs or their employer, or parental leave through the military, they may lack access to broader family leave, and the FMLA only provides unpaid leave to those spouses and partners who work for eligible employers.
- That's unacceptable.
- We'll never be able to repay the sacrifices that our troops make on behalf of us, Veterans and their families make for the rest of us. But the very, *very* least we can do is not make it so incredibly impossible for them to both be heroes for our country but also to provide for their families.
- Passing paid leave is critical to Building Back Better—and it's essential to making sure we honor our troops in the way they deserve... making our military, our economy and our nation as strong as it can possibly be.
- With that, I'm so pleased to pass it over to my friend colleague Rep. Allred.