



## News release

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Employment Security Department  
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### **National paid family leave debate highlights Washington's new "best-in-the-nation" program**

OLYMPIA – A U.S. Senate Finance subcommittee hearing related to paid family leave last week brought renewed attention to Washington's upcoming Paid Family and Medical Leave Program. This statewide insurance program is currently under development at the Employment Security Department (ESD). As laid out in [bipartisan legislation](#), passed in the 2017 legislative session, premium collection begins Jan. 1, 2019 and benefits become available Jan. 1, 2020.

"Our state is leading the way on paid family leave policy by creating the most business- and worker-friendly program in the U.S., and we're excited to see this issue being discussed at the national level," said ESD's commissioner, Suzi LeVine. "I am proud to lead the organization building a program that will ensure workers in this state won't have to choose between collecting a paycheck and putting family first."

When fully implemented in 2020, Paid Family and Medical Leave will allow working Washingtonians to take up to 12 weeks of paid leave, as needed, to care for themselves or a family member in times of serious illness or injury, for certain military connected events or as parental leave to bond with a new child coming into the family. The program is funded through premiums paid by both employees and employers, and with few exceptions, most Washington workers and businesses will participate in the [Paid Family and Medical Leave Program](#).

“Whether you work part-time, in multiple jobs, for a small business or a large corporation, by 2020 almost anyone working in this state will be able to take necessary time off to care for themselves and their loved ones. We have also talked to many employers who are excited to be able to soon offer this benefit when they otherwise couldn’t afford to do so,” LeVine said.

Washington’s program is unique in many ways, including having the highest rate of wage replacement for workers of any similar program in the U.S., business assistance grants that provide financial help to small and mid-sized employers when workers take leave, and portability of the benefit for those who work multiple jobs or change employment. Washington is also leading the nation as the first state to create a Paid Family and Medical Leave program without an existing statewide or temporary disability program in place. With the exception of Hawaii, all other states will be required to follow Washington in building a Paid Family and Medical Leave program from the ground up, should they pass similar legislation.

In [written testimony](#) submitted to the Senate subcommittee, LeVine noted there are many benefits of paid family and medical leave to both workers and employers. These benefits include better health outcomes from newborns and their parents, reduced costs and lower staff turnover for businesses, and improved health outcomes for the elderly when they have a family member helping with their care.

“Washington’s best-in-the-nation program is a testament to the good that comes from everyone having a voice in the discussions around paid family and medical leave,” LeVine added. “Because whether you need back surgery, time to care for a family member with cancer or the opportunity to welcome a child into the family, everyone will need to use Paid Family and Medical Leave at some point.”

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