

CELEBRATE AND EXPAND THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT



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CREDITS

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Twenty years after passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), American families have used the law more than 100 million times. It has allowed mothers and fathers to take care of a new baby or a seriously ill child without jeopardizing their job or their health insurance. Thanks to FMLA, many workers have also been able to take leave to care for an ailing parent or spouse or for a personal illness.

Enclosed is a sampling of stories from workers around the country who have benefitted from FMLA, as well as those unable to do so because they are not covered or cannot afford to take unpaid leave. Half the workforce isn't covered because they work for employers with fewer than 50 employees, or they work part-time. FMLA's narrow definition of family excludes those who need time to care for a same-sex partner or a sibling. And FMLA doesn't cover routine illness like the cold or flu, leaving working parents in an impossible situation when their kids get sick.

These voices are a powerful argument for celebrating this important public policy, and for the urgency of expanding it, so that no one has to choose between the job they need or the family they love.

FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT LETS WORKING PEOPLE...

...CARE FOR SERIOUSLY ILL CHILDREN



Vivian Mikhail
Topsham, Maine

When her daughter Nadia, then 16 months, became ill with a rare autoimmune condition that left her completely deaf in both ears, Vivian knew Nadia needed her full-time attention for a while. As the higher breadwinner in the family, Vivian's job and health insurance were crucial.

Thanks to the FMLA, Vivian was able to care for Nadia, learn sign language with her, take her to a playgroup for deaf children and on multiple trips to Boston Children's Hospital, and be with Nadia when she had cochlear implants.

"Without FMLA leave, we would have lost our house," Vivian says. "FMLA meant I could serve my daughter in this completely unexpected, terrifying place we were in." Having a job to go back to, and continued health insurance "gave us the tools to help our daughter be the person we knew she was going to be before this happened to her." Because Vivian's husband was able to take intermittent FMLA leave, they were able to "work together as a team."



Lauren Agoratus
Newark, New Jersey

Lauren's daughter Stephanie was born on Mother's Day 1992 with a solitary dysplastic kidney and spent her first two weeks in neonatal intensive care not expected to survive. Lauren and her husband alternated time off; both used up all their personal, vacation and sick time. Stephanie kept getting sick.

When FMLA first went into effect in August 1993, Lauren was able

to take 12 weeks of leave and her husband was able to take a month, covering the additional four months Stephanie needed to be at home.

“We were both able to keep our jobs and medical insurance coverage,” says Lauren, “which was essential as Stephanie’s first medical bill was \$28,000. The Family Medical Leave Act helped us survive financially. Our ability to care for our child at home may have saved Stephanie’s life.”

Stephanie is now 20-years-old and received a kidney transplant in the summer of 2011.



Barbara Reich
Brooklyn, New York

Barbara had a demanding management position in a hospital, a 13-year-old son and two sets of elderly, sick parents. She was helping her parents manage medical complications of a severe stroke and advanced Alzheimer’s. Then Barbara’s mother-in-law also fell ill.

Barbara inquired about FMLA and was able to reduce her schedule to a three-to-four-day workweek.

“At my level of management, working four days would have been out of the question,” Barbara says, “but the law protected me. FMLA is a true blessing.”

Barbara White
Yarmouth, Maine

Barbara lives in Maine, and her parents live in Indiana. When her mother was admitted to a nursing and rehabilitation center to recover from a near fatal illness, FMLA made it possible for Barbara to take time off to assist her.

“FMLA allowed me to retain my health benefits,” says Barbara. “Otherwise I would not have been able to do this.”

... CARE FOR SERIOUSLY ILL PARENTS

Dan Gottesman
East Aurora, New York

In July of 2011, Dan had been with his company for a little over a year when his father was diagnosed with cancer for the third time in 15 years. Dan had the doctors fill out the FMLA request and fax it back to his employer. Within days he had approval to take two to three days off every week to care for his father.

A few days later, his father took a serious turn for the worse. Dan applied for more time, and his employer was very supportive. Dan’s father died a month and a half after that diagnosis.

“I was able to go see him and keep myself sane and employed, thanks to the time I was allowed off work,” says Dan. He credits FMLA with helping him keep his job.

... CARE FOR SERIOUSLY ILL PERSONS IN LOCO PARENTIS



Susan Lamb
Biddeford, Maine

Susan says her grandparents “rescued” her and her siblings when they were young, so there was no question she would care for her grandmother, then 97 and blind, when she could no longer manage on her own.

“Fortunately for me,” says Susan, “the FMLA applied because our grandparents had adopted us when we were quite young.” Susan was able to care for her

grandmother in her final month. “I can tell you that a sad month was also very rich with moments of intimacy. You cannot put a price on peace, but I’d wager you that unresolved regret is very expensive.”

Although it was hard to do without income for that month, Susan was thrilled to have the time.

... CARE FOR NEWBORNS

Lisa Gardner
Winthrop, Maine

When Lisa and Scott decided to adopt a baby, they had to go through what she describes as “plenty of hoop-jumping, some heartbreaks, and months of waiting” until they finally got the call that a birth mother had chosen them to adopt a baby that was due in 10 weeks.

“Our baby girl was born gorgeous and healthy,” Lisa says. Thanks to the FMLA, Lisa spent the next 12 weeks “sleep-deprived, stressed, amazed and in love.”

Jennifer K. Pelton,
Baltimore, Maryland

Twelve years ago when Jennifer was pregnant with twins, she was put on bed rest, during which she used up all her sick and vacation time.

When Lucas and Cameron were born “medically fragile,” says Jennifer, “I was able to take leave without worrying about losing my job. FMLA gave me the space I needed to concentrate on my family.” Her husband was also able to take FMLA leave and spend time with the babies.

Today the twins are fine. And the Pelton family are strong supporters of the FMLA.

...CARE FOR SPOUSES

John Newton
Portland, Maine

Because of the FMLA, John was able to take 12 weeks off in April, May, and June 2012 while his wife, Sharon Rosen, recovered from surgery and radiation for uterine cancer.

"It was a very big deal to us," says John. "My employer, I feel certain, would not have allowed me that much extended leave, even leave without pay, if it were not required under the FMLA."

Says Jill, "As a single woman and a homeowner, if I lost my job because of my condition, I would lose everything."

She is grateful for FMLA, which allows her to use her accrued sick time to get the medical attention she needs and to take the leave intermittently.

Without FMLA, says Jill, "I would have had no choice but to go into work while experiencing chronic pain. I work hard to provide the quality education that my students deserve, but going to work sick would mean that I wouldn't be able to do my job to the best of my ability."

...CARE FOR THEIR OWN HEALTH



Jill Delie
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Jill is an early childhood special education teacher who was recently diagnosed with an incurable chronic nerve condition. Under doctor's orders, she is currently taking a few days of FMLA per month to undergo further tests and learn to manage her disease.



Tonya Pinkston
Atlanta, Georgia

Tonya was diagnosed with lupus several years ago, and at first was in and out of the hospital. She was getting written up at work and was at risk of losing her job when one of her managers suggested FMLA.

"It was difficult to take unpaid time off," says Tonya, "but at least I knew that I had a job to come back to."

Still, living paycheck to paycheck made the unpaid time a real financial hardship for Tonya and her family. "If I had not received a last-minute tax check," she says, "I would have been out on the street with my daughter, mother and father, whom I take care of."

FMLA COMBINED WITH STRONGER STATE LAWS AND EMPLOYER POLICIES HELP WORKING PEOPLE...

...CARE FOR A NEWBORN

Annie Coots
Pacifica, California

Annie says every morning she wakes up and kisses her happy, healthy baby, knowing she doesn't have to rush to leave the house or worry about how she'll afford to take care of her "because a lot of people worked really hard to make sure we have ample bonding time through the [state's] Paid Family Leave Program," says Annie.

"Over the years I've paid quite a bit into SDI [state disability insurance], so I don't feel I'm taking a hand-out that I didn't work for. Studies show that a safe and pleasant home environment really encourages intellect and coping skills. I will return to work knowing that my daughter is much better off because we had this time together."

James Musson
Bound Brook, New Jersey

James is a father of five, including twins born in September 2008, prior to the availability of New Jersey's Family Leave Insurance (FLI) benefits.

With the state's FLI, James was able to take six weeks in one-week increments in June through August 2009 after the birth of his twins. "This worked well for the family and me because I was able to get used to getting up in the night for feedings, and I was able to not fall behind at work," says James.

He regrets having only one to two days off after the births of his older children. "As a father, you are looked at as a 'spare part,' and not really given any chance to get used to a new family. Having [paid] family leave with the twins let me spend more quality time with the babies than I ever was able to before and be more relaxed."



Khadijah Jones
Newark, New Jersey

Khadijah used Family Leave Insurance (FLI) to stay home to bond with her son, Gabriel, after he was born in 2010.

Khadijah was eight months pregnant and working as a caregiver at an assisted living facility when she found out about FLI from the daughter of a client. She was happy to discover that she could apply for FLI in addition to taking time under the Temporary Disability Insurance program to recover from childbirth.

As a strong advocate of breastfeeding, she knew that Gabriel would greatly benefit from the time together to be able to establish a breastfeeding routine. Says Khadijah, “I feel that we are closer and [Gabriel] is healthier for the unhurried time we had together without the stress of worrying about our family’s financial situation.”

Lilian Miwa Maher
San Francisco, California

Lillian says Paid Family Leave helped her family in many ways.

“Paid Family Leave allowed me to establish breastfeeding and gave us the time needed for his father and I to feel comfortable enough for dad to watch the baby when I returned to work as a food server at a retirement home,” Lillian says. “So much changes in those priceless six weeks and I am so grateful for the opportunity.”



Christian Santiago
San Francisco, California

Christian works at Genentech, which provides paid family leave and allows employees to add their California PFL to that time. With each of her daughters, Christian was able to provide care full time for four and a half months.

“It was wonderful to have the time off with my girls and to work for an employer that fosters a culture that supports mothers and fathers taking leave,” says Christian. “We were able to choose when we wanted to have children because I knew I could take FMLA and had my company’s support.”



Larisa Casillas San Francisco, California

Larisa describes taking Paid Family Leave with her son Joaquin, as invaluable. “It

gave me peace of mind and breathing room as I was getting into the role of being a new mom,” she says.

“I loved the time I was able to spend bonding with my son, meeting other new moms and really appreciating all of the changes he was going through. I know my whole family benefitted.”

have a child with disabilities and you are the only voice that is heard, you need to advocate.

“Because of FMLA, my son is now happy, stable, successful, and eager to achieve his goals.”



Tammy Hefty Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin

Evie, Tammy’s first child, arrived in 2004 with a rare genetic disorder. Thanks to FMLA, says Tammy, “I used the next 12 weeks to learn how to be a mom while also learning how to cope with having a child born with a disability and many complicated health issues.”

When she was four months old, Evie had her first eye surgery. Tammy used some of her vacation time to provide the follow-up regimen of more than 19 eye drops a day.

Evie had three more eye surgeries in the next year. In September 2005, the family received the devastating news that Evie had cancer. She needed part of her kidney removed, followed by 18 weeks of chemo and surgery.

The flexibility allowed by Wisconsin’s FMLA enabled the family to develop

... CARE FOR SERIOUSLY ILL CHILDREN

Kimberly B. Jones Stevens Point, Wisconsin

When Kimberly’s son was diagnosed with Asperger’s and a variety of other disabilities, FMLA allowed her to stay home with him for a time while seeking out what he needed to become the happy, successful boy that she had sent to school four years earlier.

“As overwhelming as it was to hear the diagnosis,” says Kimberly, “it was also a huge relief to know there were therapies and supports available to help him.”

She applied for FMLA and began her 12-week leave. “It helped that a portion was paid for with my unused sick days,” she says. “Parenting a child is hard enough, but when you

a plan. “I had the opportunity to take care of my child when she needed it most while also knowing that my job was secure,” Tammy says. Today Evie is a beautiful, healthy eight-year-old.

... CARE FOR SERIOUSLY ILL SPOUSES AND PERSONAL ILLNESS

Pat Grossman
New London, Wisconsin

In November 2011, Pat’s husband Ted was diagnosed with cancer. She used FMLA and was his primary caregiver for daily radiation, chemotherapy and multiple doctor appointments.

Then on January 6, Pat was admitted to the hospital and underwent 10 hours of emergency heart surgery. Because Wisconsin’s FMLA allowed her to use her accrued time for any FMLA-related care, she was able to take the necessary paid time off to recover and also see her husband through his treatment in his final days.

“Being able to spend quality time saying goodbye to him meant the world to me,” Pat says. “It was very beneficial to know that I would be able to return to my job as a preschool teacher. There was enough stress on our family without worrying about employment or health insurance.”

“It made me feel that my employer valued my experience and dedication. Without Wisconsin’s FMLA, I would have been forced to resign my job, and I would’ve lost everything.”

... CARE FOR SERIOUSLY ILL PARENTS



Ajamu Dillahunt
Raleigh,
North
Carolina

Shortly after
the passage

of FMLA, Ajamu became one of four FMLA trainers in the Southern Region for his union, the American Postal Workers. Five years later, his father, an 80-year-old widower, had open-heart surgery and required several weeks of 24-hour care.

“FMLA allowed me to take care of him in his home in Virginia for two weeks before I returned to North Carolina and my brother took over,” says Ajamu. “The employer had strict attendance policies that routinely led to suspensions and firings. Because of FMLA, I was protected from disciplinary action. It was a good feeling to know with certainty that I could be with my dad in his time of need and not be worried about my job.”

Thanks to the union contract, Ajamu was also able to use paid sick and annual leave days. “As a result I didn’t experience any financial hardships,” he says.

...CARE FOR SIBLINGS



Trish Hughes Kreis
Sacramento, California

Trish, the manager of a local law firm, cares for her brother, Robert, age 47, who is disabled due to lifelong intractable epilepsy. Because of the seizures and numerous falls, Robert has become increasingly physically and intellectually challenged.

FMLA does not cover siblings. Fortunately, Trish's employer has worked with her while she juggles Robert's numerous

appointments, searches for a care facility and day programs, as well as the inevitable hospitalizations.

Says Trish, "As a manager, I have managed leaves of absences and know that unpaid, protected leave has not placed an undue burden or cost to our business. It may be an inconvenience to find temporary coverage, but it is not an insurmountable one, especially considering the benefits to the firm of standing by our employees. This flexible approach has actually saved us money by reducing turnover costs."

...CARE FOR A CHILD OF A SAME-SEX PARTNER

Vicki Pletka
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Vicki gave birth to her fourth child, Lilith Pletka-Wirth, nearly two years ago. At 26 weeks gestation, she and her partner, Rosalinda Wirth, were told the baby wasn't going to live due to serious neurological issues. Without the 'in loco parentis' provision of FMLA, Rosalinda wouldn't have been able to help care for this child when Lilith needed her the most.

"Thanks to FMLA," says Vicki, "we are able to do that just like the heterosexual couples we know with special needs children." And thanks to Wisconsin FMLA, which covers same-sex partners, Rosalinda could also care for Vicki during hospital stays.

Says Vicki, "There should be no reason whatsoever that any LGBT family be denied the rights to be with our loved ones when they need to be cared for."

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Jenny Whittner
Chicago, Illinois

Jenny's first son was born six days before FMLA was signed. She was working at a large company but took only eight weeks of unpaid leave due to financial constraints and lack of any conversation or accepted practice surrounding family leave.

"I felt pressured to take as little time off as possible," says Jenny. "It was wrenching to have to leave my eight-week old, not to mention how difficult it is to find childcare at that age."

When Jenny's second son was born years later, FMLA was firmly in place and she had a new employer. Even though that company was not big enough to qualify for FMLA, they provided four weeks of paid leave and another eight weeks unpaid.

Jenny feels strongly that all parents should have at least 12 weeks of job-protected leave after having a child.



Annie Kirschner
Portland, Oregon

Annie's experience straddled two worlds. When each of her first two children was born, Annie was able to save up about two weeks of paid time, but the remaining 10 weeks were unpaid. Her husband had no paid time he could use.

"The two weeks he took off after each of their births meant the loss of significant income," says Annie. "Though we had worked hard to save money, we quickly exhausted it and went into debt just to pay our living expenses."

This past November, Annie and her husband welcomed their third child. "This time," Annie says, "my husband had access to paid family leave. He was able to take several weeks off when the baby was born, and we didn't go into debt."

WORKING PEOPLE NEED FMLA TO BE EXPANDED SO THEY ARE NOT...

...EXCLUDED BY THE SIZE OF EMPLOYER

Edwardo Matthews
Denver, Colorado

When Edwardo's wife was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2009, she qualified for FMLA, but he did not because he worked for a firm of under 50 employees. His wife died 11 months after being diagnosed. Edwardo had only six paid sick days to take her to chemotherapy and doctors' appointments; the rest of the time he took off was unpaid.

Two months after his wife passed away, Edwardo broke his ankle. Without protection from FMLA, he was fired. Because he lost his health insurance, he waited a month for the surgery he needed.

Edwardo's two children, already grieving the loss of their mother, had to watch

as they lost their home and truck because Edwardo could not keep up with the payments.

"It really brought me down and caused an unimaginable amount of stress," he says. He was out of work for almost a year.



Jeannine Sato
Durham,
North Carolina

When Jeannine was pregnant with her first child, she felt sure that her non-profit employer would

allow her unpaid time off to care for her newborn. But her request was denied.

Says Jeannine, "I was told our company, despite having more than 100 employees, was exempt from the FMLA law because fewer than

50 people were located in each of our three offices, separated by about 80 miles.

“Despite a written ‘family-friendly’ HR policy, I was required to come back to work at six weeks postpartum or risk losing my job. With an exhausted, betrayed and heavy heart, I returned to work at the worst time possible.”

Six months later, Jeannie left that job. “It took them six months to replace me,” she notes, “costing them much more than the six weeks unpaid leave I requested.”

... EXCLUDED BY THE NUMBER OF HOURS, EMPLOYMENT STATUS OR LENGTH OF EMPLOYMENT

Gwenath Douglas Hartford, Connecticut

Paraprofessionals like Gwenath work the entire school year, but because legally they cannot work more than 6.5 hours a day, the total number of hours worked, 1,125, falls just below the 1,250 threshold required by FMLA.

In 2012, Connecticut law was changed to lower that threshold to 950 hours. Gwenath, a para-educator for children in special education, was one of many who testified in favor of that new statute. She described the painful and terminal illness experienced by her husband of 14 years. Said Gwenath, “I went

from wife and lover to caregiver, advocate, legal representative, nurse’s aide, social worker, and on top of everything else, provider.”

Without FMLA, she was unable to spend much of those last weeks with him. “It pulled hard on me not knowing if this would be the last time I would see him again,” she testified.



Sharon Ness
University Place,
Washington

In 2007, Sharon was working

as a nurse in a hospital when her father began his battle with terminal cancer. Because she was a weekend supplemental employee, Sharon was ineligible for FMLA. As a nurse with 39 years of experience, she wanted to be there for her dad, but his condition was unpredictable.

That November, Sharon was involved in a serious automobile accident. “As I was laying there and talking with my son,” she says, “I became afraid of losing my job.”

In all, she missed only 10 days over a 16-month period. Yet despite a 19-year employment history with the hospital, and lots of co-worker support, Sharon was warned numerous times by her employer to decrease what they called “excessive absenteeism.”

Allowing workers to take leave, she believes, increases loyalty and productivity – as well as employee well being. After she recovered, she found another job.

Maria Tacoma, Washington

Maria works at a large hotel chain near downtown Tacoma.

After a month on the job, she found out she was three months pregnant. Maria was working back-to-back shifts to save up for the baby. Some days she would work almost 12-hour days. Because Maria did not have paid sick days, she couldn't schedule doctor appointments in advance and had to miss crucial check-ups.

Maria's pregnancy was very difficult and one day she woke up experiencing dizziness and pain. When she called her supervisor to ask for the day off, he told her if she didn't come in, not to bother coming back. Maria went to work sick rather than risk her job. After giving birth early at eight months, Maria was not able to take more than a long weekend off to recover.

She describes the next three weeks as “by far, the most difficult time of my life.” The stress of working in Kent, driving to Seattle to spend a few precious hours with Connor, then fighting rush hour traffic to pick up her older son before childcare closed—all while recovering from childbirth—left her emotionally and physically drained.

“I was surrounded every day by the research citing how important those first days are for bonding and lifelong learning,” said Selena.

“It broke my heart that I could not be with my son when he needed me so much.” The experience inspired her to work for paid family leave legislation in Washington State.



Mo Kessler
Greensboro,
North Carolina

Mo has worked at a grocery store and in retail, but she's never had paid time off. Since the age of 11

she's suffered from a progressive pain disease.

“Not having access to paid time off... has put a tremendous amount of stress on my life in dealing with my disease [and] made it impossible to be healthy and be a worker at the same time,” says Mo.

Because she needs to work to support herself, the lack of access to paid time has meant that she's

...UNABLE TO TAKE LEAVE BECAUSE OF LACK OF PAY

Selena Allen Kent, Washington

Selena's son Connor was due in May, but he arrived unexpectedly in early April, facing serious medical issues.

Unable to afford the loss of income, Selena and her husband were forced to make the difficult decision for Selena to return to work four days after giving birth and save her paid time off for when Connor came home.

never had the opportunity to take the time she needs to get better. Mo believes this lack “has contributed to me being sicker in my life.”

Esteban
Bellevue, WA

Esteban needs prostate surgery. But he refuses to get the medical treatment he needs because he

cannot afford to take the estimated three months of recovery time off from work without pay.

When his daughter questions his decision to continue working, he asks her if she will be able to take on his financial responsibilities while he is away from work. He knows this isn't possible because Maribel is struggling to keep up with her own bills.

...EXCLUDED BY DEFINITION OF FAMILY

Anne Marie Pearson,
West Chester, Pennsylvania

Anne's life changed forever when her sister, Joanne Van Newkirk, was diagnosed with terminal, late-stage cancer. In a very short period of time, Joanne needed around the clock care. She wasn't married and had no children.

Anne applied for FMLA but was denied because Joanne was a sibling.

Says Anne, “I made the difficult decision to resign my position of 17 years to help take care of my sister until she passed away. I often think, ‘Who would have taken care of Joanne if I did not sacrifice my livelihood and my job?’”



“Today's economy is not one in which anyone can afford to choose between taking care of a family member or keeping their job.”

With support from cancer groups and the Disability Rights Legal Center, Anne has worked to change Pennsylvania's family leave law to expand the definition of family. The bill is named “Joanne's Law.”

...FACING SEVERE FINANCIAL HARDSHIP



**Eva Henry
Thornton,
Colorado**

When her daughter was 10 years old, Eva needed three days off

from her job as a loan officer at a credit union to be with her during and after major surgery for chronic ear infections. “As a Mom, I knew that a child recovers faster when she has a parent by her side,” Eva said. “But I also knew that I needed my job.”

Eva had had to leave her children home alone on many occasions – including times when her daughter’s ear infections meant severe pain, high fevers, horrific rashes and bouts of vomiting. This time, Eva was determined to be at her side.

Three days before the surgery, Eva learned she was being fired. She’s also just learned her landlord had sold the property she lived in. “I now had no job, no home, no money,” she said. “I was forced to apply for food stamps.”

Eva talks about how much she loved that job. “Being fired like that – just because I had to take care of my child – left a hole in my life.”

Eva’s daughter is now grown. Though that childhood surgery left her with no hearing in her left ear and only partial hearing in her right, she’s a college grad and works as a Congressional aide.



**Ali Hurd
Portland, Oregon**

Ali is a public school teacher. Her first child was born while she was teaching in Mexico City, where she had a fully-paid three-month leave. When her second child was due in Portland, Ali says she was shocked to discover her three-month leave would be entirely unpaid.

To support the family, her husband had to take a second job in order to pay the mortgage and was hardly home during their second child’s first three months.

Says Ali, “I just keep thinking how ironic it is that Mexico has a more just leave policy than the United States.”



Jessica Smith
Denver,
Colorado

Jessica, a student at

University of Denver, recently learned that she'd had a stroke when she was three years old. Her mother was an hourly employee and had to take a lot of time off work to take care of her.

Says Jessica, "Very quickly, she used up the little paid time off she had, and she had to take the leave unpaid. She was worried about not making money. Without protection from the Family and Medical Leave Act, which had not yet been passed, she was worried her employer would even let her go."

It pained Jessica to hear how much her mother was forced to worry about their family's finances at a time when she was still in the hospital recovering.

"Hard-working Americans like my mom shouldn't be forced to deal with this kind of financial strain when they are caring for sick loved ones," Jessica said.

restaurant, Elose worked hard. After sustaining an injury on the job, she went to a health clinic.

"I went back to work and gave my boss the papers that said I had hurt my hand doing the job, and I went to the hospital to get care," she said. "Without even asking me how I was, my boss told me that I no longer had my job at the restaurant. I was in shock. Being fired was devastating."

Elose filed for unemployment while she looked for another job, but received only one check for \$173. When she asked why, she was told that her boss maintained she had voluntarily quit.



Anjeannette Brown
Portland, Oregon

Anjeannette is the mother of three boys and has worked in construction for nearly two years. Last year she sprained her ankle badly and couldn't go to work for a week.

...UNABLE TO TAKE LEAVE FOR ROUTINE ILLNESS

Elose Arestil
Miami, Florida

Elose lives with her teenaged son. With the earnings from her job as a dishwasher, she also helped support family members back home in Haiti. During her year and a half at the

“I don’t have any paid sick days,” Anjeannette said, “so I lost a whole week’s pay, which meant I wasn’t able to pay all my bills and wasn’t able to pay for gas. It took a month for me to catch up.”

Anjeannette also had to go back to work before her ankle was healed because she just couldn’t afford to take any more time without pay. “After a few hours of working each day, my ankle was really swollen and painful,” she said. “I had to untie my boots because of the swelling—and then I got in trouble with my boss for untying my boots!”



Marianne Bullock Amherst, Massachusetts

In her seven months as a home health care worker for a large Massachusetts agency, Marianne Bullock never missed a day of work. But when her daughter Sora, then 18 months old, contracted a stomach virus, Bullock

called her supervisor to say she needed to stay home.

“I told her I expected to be back in 24 hours but the next day Sora wasn’t taking any fluids so I asked for another day off,” recalls Bullock, who did not receive any paid sick time. On the third day, her daughter seemed better but as Bullock headed out to work, the little girl threw up.

“When I called work that time I was told not to bother coming in. I was fired.”

The loss of her paycheck pushed Bullock and her husband Thom, a carpenter, deeper into poverty. “I begged them to let me work two more weeks so I could at least pay for the day care we had already committed to,” recalls Bullock. But she was the only parent working in the department at the time and her manager was unsympathetic.

“There was nothing I could do,” says Bullock, whose family struggled for several months to cover basic needs before she found another health care job.

Woong Chang Washington, DC

Woong chose to work in the restaurant industry because it allowed him flexibility for what he calls his “three passions in life: food, music and travel.” When he moved from California to D.C., however, he was shocked to learn how low the tipped minimum wage was and struggled to pay the rent on his bartender pay.

Then Woong came down with the highly contagious H1N1 virus. He says he knew he should have called out right away, but with no paid sick time, “I simply couldn’t afford not to work.” He’s aware of the contagion he must have spread – and of the consequences of not seeking medical treatment right away.

After a few days, Woong became so ill that he could not get out of bed. He wound up being incapacitated for over a month – and losing his job. As a result, he fell into debt and was on the brink of poverty.

“Paid sick days for even a week would have made things a lot easier for me,” Woong says.

Maria McClusky Orlando, Florida

Two years ago, Maria was working in retail, which is notorious for not giving good benefits to workers, including salaried employees like herself. She’d been on the job for a year. “I was working crazy hours during the holiday season,” she says, when she suffered a gall bladder attack and was sent to the hospital.

“They advised me to see a specialist and said I might need surgery,” Maria says. “The doctors were adamant about me taking care of myself so I didn’t get worse.” Their advice: take a week off to see other doctors and be available in case of emergency surgery.

Maria says her managers made it clear she had to show up at nine the next morning or she’d be out

of a job. Because her husband’s work as an independent contractor was unreliable, Maria’s income was key for paying the household bills. She couldn’t risk losing her job.

“Instead of taking a week to recover, it took me weeks to recover,” Maria says. “Because it was the busy season, I couldn’t schedule doctors’ appointments. This was not good for me, but also it wasn’t good for the company I worked for.”



FAMILY VALUES WORK

Family Values @ Work is a multi-state consortium of 20 state coalitions working for paid sick days, family leave insurance and other policies that value families at work.

Visit www.FamilyValuesAtWork.org for more stories and information on how you can become involved.