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AT ONE-YEAR MARK, CALIFORNIA'S PAID FAMILY LEAVE LAW BENEFITS THOUSANDS OF NEW PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Workers Laud Paid Time Off to Spend With Ill Family Members, Newborns

SACRAMENTO – The Paid Family Leave Coalition and First 5 California welcomed statistics released today that show more than 137,000 workers took advantage of California's Paid Family Leave Law during its first year. The law provides much-needed relief for workers who cannot afford to take time off from work without pay to bond with a newborn, adopted or foster child or to care for a seriously ill family member.

“My time off with my babies was amazing,” said Lorna Richardson Evans, who took paid leave to bond with her triplets. “I took the time off after they came home from the hospital. I would have had to quit my job because my babies needed me. Paid leave gave me the opportunity to keep my job and be with my children. I was able to take care of them because they were so small and so preemie. They needed me.”

California Employment Development Department statistics show that, since July 1, 2004, more than 150,000 parents applied for paid leave benefits to bond with a newborn while 20,000 Californians took time off to care for a seriously ill family member.

Rob Reiner, Chair of First 5 California, a state commission dedicated to improving the lives of children ages 0 to 5, was particularly pleased to note that 17 percent of parents applying for bonding time were fathers. “Study after study tells us that the parent-child bond during the first few months of life is vital to a child's healthy development,” said Reiner. “It's good to see fathers taking advantage of this opportunity.”

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The Paid Family Leave Law, authored by Senator Sheila Kuehl, is funded entirely by workers through contributions to California's State Disability Insurance program and allows employees to collect up to 55 percent of their salary, up to a maximum of \$840 per week, while caring for their loved ones. According to EDD, close to \$300 million in benefits were paid to workers in the program's first year, which was less than originally projected.

"The program has had a critical impact on working families who have eldercare responsibilities—and it represents a good beginning," said Kathleen Kelly, Executive Director of Family Caregiver Alliance/National Center on Caregiving. "As awareness of the benefits of paid family leave increases, so will usage among Californians who are so often caught in the middle between work and family demands."

Kim Kruckel, Education Coordinator for the Paid Family Leave Coalition, agreed. "Part of our challenge is to reach out to and educate communities who have not yet learned they're entitled to these benefits." To that end, the Coalition conducts workshops and outreach to ensure Paid Family Leave fulfills its potential to help improve the health of California's families.

"My mother suffers from dementia," said Cheryl Stewart, a beneficiary of California's Paid Family Leave Law. "Her condition is not serious enough to require skilled nursing care, but she has to have someone with her at all times. That's when I turned to Paid Family Leave. I was able to get paid while taking two days off each week for six months, and spend those days taking care of my mother."

California's landmark law is serving as a model for other states around the country. Currently, 21 states are considering some form of paid family leave legislation. A federal version was introduced yesterday by Representative Pete Stark (D-CA), which would institute a nationwide system for paid family leave.

The Paid Family Leave Outreach Coalition, a statewide group of social services and advocacy organizations and unions, is working to educate California's working families about paid family leave. Members of the Coalition include: Labor Project for Working Families; The Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center; National Partnership for Women & Families; California Labor Federation, Office of Senator Sheila Kuehl; First 5 California; Family Caregiver Alliance/National Center on Caregiving; Equal Rights Advocates; California National Organization for Women; CA Commission on the Status of Women; Asian Law Caucus; and the California Women's Law Center.