

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
***The Paid Family Leave Collaborative***

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**ON FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF CALIFORNIA’S SUCCESSFUL PAID FAMILY LEAVE  
LAW, CONGRESSWOMAN WOOLSEY & ADVOCATES CALL FOR MORE  
PROGRESS ON STATE AND FEDERAL LEVEL**

***Members of California’s Paid Family Leave Collaborative hope the state’s leadership will spur national effort – and that more Californians will become aware of the critically needed benefit.***

**San Francisco, Calif., August 5, 2009:** Five years after California enacted the first paid family leave law in the nation, Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey (D-CA) joined with members of California’s Paid Family Leave Collaborative to call for a national initiative to ensure that all Americans are able to care for a seriously ill family member or bond with a new child without fear of losing their paychecks.

California’s Paid Family Leave Collaborative, comprised of the Legal Aid Society–Employment Law Center, Equal Rights Advocates, the California Women’s Law Center and the Labor Project for Working Families, also wants to ensure that more working Californians know about and exercise their right to paid family leave. “It is wonderful that in the first five years more than 740,000 Californians have been able to take advantage of the state benefit, yet studies show that only a fraction of those eligible are aware of their rights to paid family leave,” said Elizabeth Kristen, senior staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society–Employment Law Center.

More than 13 million Californians are entitled to receive up to 55 percent of their wages for six weeks while they provide care for a family member with a serious health condition or to bond with a new child. Employees directly fund the paid family leave program via paycheck deductions through the state disability insurance program.

“Unfortunately, those most in need of the benefits are least aware of their rights,” continued Kristen. “According to a recent study from the University of California at Los Angeles, 86 percent of Californians earning under \$25,000 a year are unaware of available paid family leave benefits.”

One Californian who was able to utilize paid family leave at a critical time in her family's life is Lorraine Peña. Peña, a working mother who took paid family leave to care for her seriously ill father said, "I paid into the paid family leave insurance program and received benefits from it when my father needed my help." Peña said she feels fortunate to live in a state where she is able to contribute to -- and take advantage of -- the paid family leave program since "it would have been financially impossible to take time off work without pay." Peña also said she hopes other workers like her will become aware of the law.

Art Pulaski, executive secretary-treasurer of the California Labor Federation, which co-sponsored California's paid family leave legislation five years ago, underscored the state's leadership and the importance of bringing the benefit to the nation. "California is leading the nation by demonstrating that paid family leave is both crucial to a healthy society and financially viable, even during tough economic times. The next logical step is to expand these benefits to workers across the country."

The movement for paid family leave is growing at the state and federal level. Since California enacted paid family leave five years ago, two more states, New Jersey and Washington, have followed suit, and six others -- Arizona, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Missouri, New York and Oregon -- are currently considering similar legislation.

On the national stage, Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey (D-CA) has introduced H.R. 2339, the Family Income Responding to Significant Transitions (FIRST) Act to create federal support for paid family leave programs nationwide. "While the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) has benefited a lot of working Americans, most workers still can't take advantage of FMLA because they simply cannot afford to take unpaid leave," said Woolsey. "The FIRST Act will provide grants to states with existing paid family leave laws to implement and administer their paid family leave programs, and assist states like California to do more outreach and education. The grants will also encourage other states to develop paid family leave programs following the lead of California, New Jersey and Washington state."

"We want to ensure that American workers are never forced to choose between their family members and their paychecks," said Woolsey.

*For a claim form or more information on Paid Family Leave in California, contact the Employment Development Department helpline at 1-877-BE-THERE (in Armenian, Cantonese, English, Spanish, Punjabi, Tagalog, and Vietnamese) or 1-800-445-1312 (TTY) and at [www.edd.ca.gov](http://www.edd.ca.gov). **The Paid Family Leave Collaborative**, a statewide group of nonprofit organizations committed to informing Californians of their rights under Paid Family Leave, offers free legal information and assistance, outreach and educational resources and workshops. Please visit [www.paidfamilyleave.org](http://www.paidfamilyleave.org).*

*These Paid Family Leave Collaborative member organizations have free helplines for workers with questions about their family leave rights:*

- *Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center: 1-800-880-8047 (Cantonese, English, Spanish, Russian & Tagalog)*

- *Equal Rights Advocates: 1-800-839-4372 (English & Spanish)*
- *Labor Project for Working Families: 1-510-643-7088 (union members)*

*California's Paid Family Leave Collaborative includes the Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center, Equal Rights Advocates, the California Women's Law Center and the Labor Project for Working Families, with support from the California Labor Federation.*