

MICHIGAN BABIES WILL THRIVE UNDER THE FAMILY LEAVE OPTIMAL COVERAGE PLAN



In addition to being one of the most effective policies a state can implement to promote employment and boost economic growth and prosperity, **Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML)** is also one of the most powerful policies a state can implement to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of babies. Fourteen states and the District of Columbia have adopted universal paid leave policies. The **Family Leave Optimal Coverage Plan (FLOC)**, introduced by Senator Geiss in March of 2023, offers Michigan a chance to join this growing list. Their experiences provide insight into the impact state PFML has on the health development of babies.

1 The Bottom Line

- The first three years of a baby's life are critical to healthy lifelong outcomes. **Universal paid family and medical leave provides greater opportunities for infants to spend stable and safe time with their parent or caregiver.**
- During the first three years, an infant's brain grows to roughly **80 percent** of their adult size. Critical to the healthy creation of those neurologic pathways is the bond between babies and their parents. Studies show paid family leave **increases both the amount and quality of time parents spend with children**, helping babies develop **more secure attachments** to their caregivers.
- According to experts like Dr. Ruth Petersen, Director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Nutrition, breastfeeding provides unmatched benefits for both babies and their mothers, including improving a baby's immune system and reducing a mother's likelihood to develop breast cancer.² The additional time that PFML allows mothers to spend with their babies makes it **easier for them to breastfeed**. Studies have shown universal paid leave increases the duration that economically disadvantaged mothers are able to breastfeed by more than two months.³

② When paid family leave benefits are available, mothers are more likely to thrive

Healthy moms lead to healthy babies. This includes both a mother's physical ability to care for a newborn and their emotional well-being, which affects the quality of care that they can provide. Multiple studies have found that women who participated in paid family leave had **lower** postpartum depression scores than women who did not.⁴ The duration of leave also matters. It has a direct effect on mothers' risk of experiencing postpartum depression; for every additional week of leave mothers took, the likelihood they would experience postpartum depression decreased.⁵

③ Universal PFML promotes healthier outcomes for infants and toddlers

Several studies highlight that universal PFML **increases** the likelihood of babies attending medical check-ups in their first year.⁶ Well-child visits are critical opportunities for families to keep track of their baby's growth and development, ensuring early identification of delays so that no child falls behind. In Michigan, one in four households with children report missing, skipping, or delaying well-child visits in the first 15 months.⁷ Paid family and medical leave can help.

Babies born under 5 pounds and 8 ounces are considered at a low birth weight, increasing the chances they will experience health challenges. PFML decreases the likelihood that infants will be born at low birth weights by just over 3 percent.⁸

④ Paid family and medical leave promotes child safety and well-being

Infants younger than the age of one face the greatest likelihood of experiencing child maltreatment, both in Michigan and across the country. However, effective policies that prioritize nurturing parent-child relationships and alleviate financial strain within families can significantly reduce this risk. Paid family leave makes it easier for parents to spend quality time with their babies, strengthening parent-child bonds, and **reducing child maltreatment**.

Researchers from the Centers for Disease Control found that implementation of paid family and medical leave in California reduced the infant hospitalization rate for abusive head trauma - a change that can likely be attributed to the positive effect that paid parental leave has on parental stress and depression, both of which are risk factors for child abuse.⁹ Michigan State University researchers have also found evidence linking state-paid family leave policies to lowered rates of child welfare referrals for infant maltreatment.¹⁰



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