



NEWS RELEASE

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Family and Medical Leave Act Crucial to Working Women

Women Work! joins with other organizations to oppose changes to the FMLA

WASHINGTON, DC — Women Work! The National Network for Women's Employment joined with other organizations this morning in a Senate HELP Committee forum to oppose any regulatory revisions to the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Current provisions in the Act make it possible for displaced homemakers, single mothers and other women in transition to financially support their families by maintaining stable employment in the event of illness or other familial responsibilities. Though the FMLA has been widely successful, proposed changes to the law would undermine critical protections.

"Any role back of the protections offered to workers under FMLA legislation would be devastating to displaced homemakers and single mothers," according to Women Work! CEO Jill Miller. "When a single woman is the sole caregiver and sole wage earner in a household, adequate family and medical leave is crucial to that family's survival and success."

One proposed change to the FMLA would restrict employees to taking sick leave in half-day increments, thus forcing employees who require frequent short treatments - such as radiation therapy for cancer - to use up their allotted FMLA leave more quickly. Lack of adequate sick leave impacts working single mothers disproportionately, as their health often suffers due to the stress of juggling work, child raising and personal family caregiving responsibilities.

Another proposed change to the FMLA would restrict the definition of "serious illnesses" to exclude conditions including acute appendicitis, pneumonia and some types of heart attack. Since its enactment in 1993 the FMLA has allowed women the ability to care for themselves and their children in the event of serious illness, but Miller explains, "the proposed revisions to the FMLA will threaten the ability of working moms to take time off to care for a sick child while maintaining job security."

Recent research estimates that up to three quarters of family caregivers are women, but many of these women are also workers. Family leave allows eligible working moms and dads to take up to 12 weeks unpaid leave from their jobs, for events including the birth or illness of a child, without jeopardizing employment security. Family and medical leave allows single parents to meet the dual demands of work and family.

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Women Work! advocates for policies that increase education and training opportunities, ensure economic security and provide work support for displaced homemakers, single mothers, welfare recipients and other women in transition. Toward this end, support for adequate family, personal and medical leave is a key aspect of Women Work!'s 2005-2006 policy agenda.

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Women Work! The National Network for Women's Employment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that advocates for women's economic security through policies, programs and partnerships. Since 1978, the Network has assisted more than 10 million women to successfully enter, re-enter and advance in the workforce. Through supporting, advocating and advancing women's economic self-sufficiency, Women Work! members strengthen families and communities. For more information, visit www.womenwork.org or call (202) 467-6346.

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