

Ubuntu
University of Idaho
875 Perimeter Dr.
Moscow, ID 83844

Dear Faculty Senate and President Green,

Please accept our letter of support of Athena and the faculty senate working group on parental leave's proposed policy for 12 weeks paid parental leave for UI employees. As outlined in their white paper, paid parental leave is essential for retaining strong staff and makes UI a competitive employer in the region. This letter will outline the current state of FMLA at UI, the ways UI is behind its peer institutions, and the important benefits paid leave offers for students and employees.

Parental leave in the United States is covered under the Family and Medical Leave (FMLA) program. This program grants employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave during which their jobs and benefits are protected.ⁱ While employers may provide some paid leave options or extended time, these expanded leave programs are predominately only available to people in high income earning jobs.

Many new parents are not even eligible for FMLA. To qualify, one needs to have worked at their current place of employment for 12 months or more and have worked at least 1250 hours within the preceding 12 months. Thus, people new to the university may not be eligible. Although FMLA does allow for the use of 12 weeks leave within the year following the birth, it is an unpaid leave.

For context, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development compared 41 wealthy nations and found that the United States ranks last in terms of paid leave for new parents. While the United States does not guarantee any paid leave, the top ranked nation, Estonia, offers 86 weeks of paid leave for new parents. Nine countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Slovakia, and Slovenia) offer over a year of paid leave.ⁱⁱ Some nations also permit leave to begin in the last weeks of pregnancy. In Norway, for example, birth parents are given three weeks of leave prior to their due date; in the Czech Republic it is 6-8 weeks.ⁱⁱⁱ

Despite being undervalued in the United States, paid parental leave has important advantages for businesses. It increases staff retention, worker productivity, and competition for jobs^{iv}. It increases women's work participation and continued employment.^v

The University of Idaho is behind its Idaho peer institutions on this issue. Boise State University, Idaho State University, Lewis-Clark State College, and even the state of Idaho government offers eight weeks of paid leave for new parents immediately following the birth and runs concurrently with FMLA with the same eligibility requirements. Moreover, in passing this policy the University of Idaho would join other R1 institutions such as the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill which offers a full semester leave for new parents; the University of Colorado at Boulder, Colorado Springs and Denver which offer 18 weeks paid leave; the University of Oregon, University of New Hampshire, the University of Chicago, and others who provide 12 weeks paid leave for staff and faculty^{vi}.

Providing paid leave for employees also improves services and courses for students. Parents able to recover from the birth of a child and/or assuming responsibility for a new child and the significant impact it has on their lives are more prepared to offer high quality classroom engagement and creative pedagogy. They are better prepared to engage mindfully and generously with students in all areas of the University.

Paid parental leave also has significant benefits to the families in question. Paid leave is associated with healthy child development, maternal health, and paternal child involvement. Parental leave is associated with higher rates of chest feeding, a reduction in infant health problems, and infant death^{vi}. These benefits have lifetime impacts on children. They also significantly help birth parents. When forced to truncate their healing time as a result of unpaid leave, birth parents lack the time to heal both physically and mentally from childbirth. They are unable to adapt to their changing bodies and altered lives.^{viii}

As reported by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the United States lags behind other wealthy countries in its parental leave policies. Despite this national shortcoming, it is essential that businesses take action to support their employees as they become parents. Offering paid leave at the University of Idaho is not only economically beneficial, it is also the ethical and moral thing to do. It aligns with our core values of an institution and is necessarily to improve equity on campus.

Sincerely,

The Ubuntu Committee of Faculty Senate
Dr. Kristin Haltinner, Chair

Approved unanimously by the committee on October 05, 2021

ⁱ “Family and Medical Leave (FMLA)”. United States Department of Labor. Accessed November 5th, 2020.

<https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/benefits-leave/fmla>

ⁱⁱ Gretchen Livingston and Thomas, Deja. “Among 41 countries, only U.S. lacks paid parental leave.” Pew Research Center. December 16, 2019. Accessed November 5th, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/16/u-s-lacks-mandated-paid-parental-leave/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development. “Parental Leave Systems.” Accessed February 8th, 2021. https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf

^{iv} K. Romig and K. Bryant. 2021. “A National Paid Leave Program Would Help Workers, Families.” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

^v M. Eichner. *The Freemarket Family*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

^{vi} A.C. Morgan, S.F. Way, M. Galesic, D.B. Larremore, A. Clauset, “Paid parental leave at US and Canadian universities.” Retrieved from <https://aaronclauset.github.io/parental-leave/> (2018)

^{vii} M. Rossin-Slader and L. Uniat. “Paid Family Leave Policies and Population Health.” *Health Affairs*. 2019; National Partnership for Women & Families, “The Child Development Case for a National Paid Family and Medical Leave Program.” 2018; M. Rossin-Slader et al, “Did California Paid Family Leave Impact Infant Health?” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*. 2018.

^{viii} K. Haltinner. *No Perfect Birth*. Roman and Littlefield. 2021.