



WOMEN'S CENTER
Division of Equity and Diversity
875 Perimeter Drive MS 1064
Moscow ID 83844-1064

208-885-2777
208-885-6285 [FAX]
wcenter@uidaho.edu
uidaho.edu/womenscenter

November 2021

Dear Faculty Senate and President Green,

In the early 1970s, a small but courageous group of women-identified university faculty and staff, the Women's Core Caucus, filed a complaint with the Idaho Commission on Human Rights against the University of Idaho, providing extensive evidence of gender-based discrimination at the institution. The university heard the group's claims and in May 1974, signed a Conciliation Agreement which brought into formal (funded) existence our campus Women's Center. For close to 50 years now, the Women's Center has been dedicated to promoting and working towards gender equity on campus by supporting students, staff, and faculty; educating our community on issues relating to gender equity; and advocating for the establishment of fair and just institutional policies that remove barriers for all individuals to pursue fulfilling professional and academic lives at our university.

While many of the issues detailed in the complaint have been resolved, or continue to be addressed, the lack of paid parental leave at the University of Idaho—the only public university in the state that does not offer these benefits—continues to pose significant barriers to employee career development and work-life balance, and to have a detrimental effect on professional advancement opportunities and family support.

As one of only eight countries in the world without national paid maternity leave, the U.S. has a dismal global reputation with regard to holistic support of employees and their families. The average length of paid leave among countries that offer it is *twenty-nine weeks*. We can only imagine the levels of job satisfaction and loyalty that such a policy at the University of Idaho would bring to our Vandals.

I grew up in the U.K. (which offers up to a year of paid leave for new parents) and emigrated to the U.S. after graduating from college. I was shocked to learn, as a newly married young adult entering the workforce, that I would have no paid maternity benefits whatsoever, and that I would have to work for a full year before I accrued a mere two weeks of paid vacation time. For this reason, my husband and I delayed starting our family for six whole years. When we finally did choose to have children, I was forced to stay home to care for them rather than work, because my monthly earnings amounted to less than the cost of the daycare fees we would have had to pay for me to work outside the home. In consequence, I began my current professional career trajectory more than 12 years after obtaining my Bachelor's degree. I lost 12 years of contributing important skills and expertise to my field. 12 years of accrued earnings that would have provided significant financial relief with two dependents now pursuing full-time higher education. 12 years of paying into a retirement fund. 12 years of professional advancement opportunities.

The losses faced by employees without paid family leave are, in some cases, almost insurmountable. The losses to our institution are significant, as well. Professionals often leave institutions when their employer neglects to support them as complete human beings with needs and commitments outside of the workplace. Women in particular are deeply harmed by the practice of unpaid maternity leave. The wage gap between mothers and childless women is now greater than that between early career women and men, and college-educated women with one child lose an average of \$1,000,000 (yes—*one million dollars*) in earnings over the course of their lifetime (Crittenden, 2010*). Gender diverse and LGBTQA families raising children are also heavily penalized by the lack of universal parental leave, as patriarchal societal values continue to place dated and unrealistic expectations for the majority of dependent caregiving on women-identified individuals.

In purely capitalistic terms, parents, regardless of their gender, are cultivating human capital, raising productive citizens who will directly contribute to the health of our economy and the wealth of our society. It is astonishing and short-sighted in such a profit-driven society that they are still so undervalued. Failing to support parents impacts children, too. Parental/caregiver wellbeing is inextricably connected to the wellbeing of their children, and parents' ability to provide both financially and emotionally for their children has lasting (lifelong) consequences.

As others have mentioned, when we talk about the "Vandal Family," the phrase rings hollow when employees feel the institution fails to value and provide adequately for employees supporting their families. In my capacity as a university professional whose responsibility it is to advocate for gender equity, I strongly encourage serious consideration of Athena's proposal for a paid parental leave policy at the University of Idaho. This investment is critical to show employees that they and their contributions to the institution are respected and valued, and I am confident it will lead to more successful employee recruitment efforts and increased retention rates.

Sincerely,



Lysa Salsbury, M.S. Ed.
Director
University of Idaho Women's Center

* Crittenden, A. (2010). *The price of motherhood: Why the most important job in the world is still the least valued* (2nd ed.). Picador.