



## Introduction

Families' economic stability and security depend on several factors beyond their working situation. For some workers, wages are supplemented by benefits, like paid leave. However, Ohio's low-wage workers are less likely to have access to these benefits, which leads to higher levels of economic insecurity and a higher risk of violence.

Low-wage workers have limited access to paid time off. When workers have access to paid time off, they know that their financial situation is secure even if they or a loved one become ill or have other needs that prevent them from working. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of paid leave for the safety and security of workers.

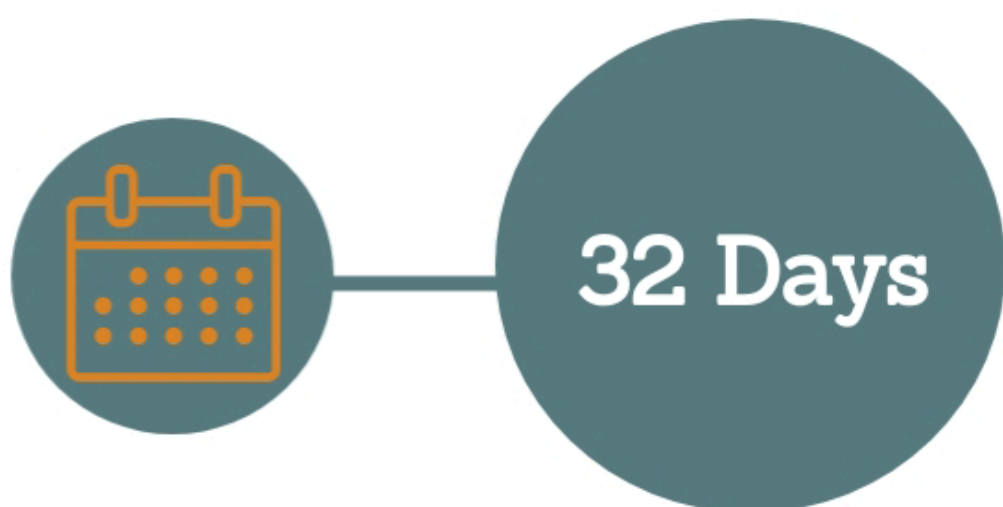
## The Family and Medical Leave Act

Twelve weeks of unpaid leave per year for parental, family caregiving, or personal medical needs are guaranteed to workers at companies with 50 or more employees through the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) of 1993.<sup>268</sup> Ohio has no laws that provide for additional leave, paid or unpaid, except for one related to military service.<sup>269</sup>



Due to its eligibility criteria, only 56% of workers across the country are even eligible for the 12 weeks of unpaid leave provided by the FMLA.

FMLA falls short for most workers. Less than half (48.5%) of workers who earn below \$40,000 per year have access to FMLA.<sup>271</sup> Eligibility rates vary across demographic groups.



The average FMLA leave is 32 days. Six weeks without pay would cause economic stress for almost any family. For a low-income family, using FMLA could have devastating outcomes, such as eviction from their home.

**Poverty does not cause intimate partner violence (IPV). Rather, the same conditions that create poverty also create the risk factors for IPV.**

Several risk factors for IPV are related to economic and financial security. They range from personal factors to conditions affecting our entire society.

### Economic Risk Factors for IPV Perpetration

- **Societal Factors:** Income inequality
- **Community Factors:** Neighborhood poverty, diminished economic opportunities, high unemployment rates
- **Relationship and Individual Factors:** Economic stress

Strengthening household financial security and strengthening supports for workers and families are two ways to reduce the risk for IPV perpetration in Ohio.

**Men of all races** ages 18-44 with a high school education or less have **the least amount of access to FMLA**.<sup>272</sup> The majority of these men would not be able to take unpaid time off work if they or a loved one had a serious medical issue, or they were welcoming a new child into their family. Among workers who are eligible for FMLA leave, **another barrier** remains the fact that **this leave is unpaid**.

FMLA is inaccessible to 62% of Ohio workers, either due to eligibility requirements or because they cannot forgo the pay.

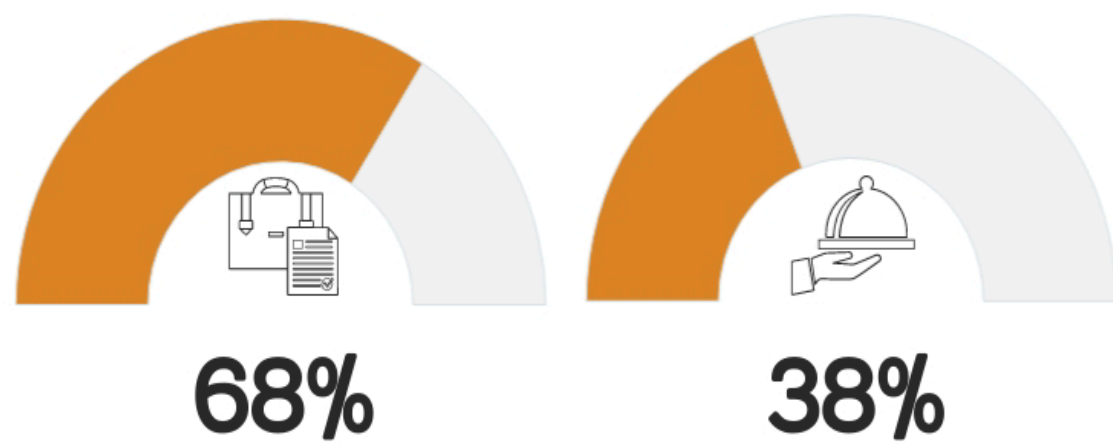
## Access to Paid Leave

**The majority of workers in Ohio functionally have no access to leave. Access to paid leave is even rarer.**

Nationally, 13% of private-sector workers had access to paid family leave in 2017.<sup>275</sup> For full-time workers, this number was 16%, and for part-time workers, it was just 5%.<sup>276</sup> Access also varies based on income level, with low-wage workers having the least access. Only 4% of workers with incomes in the lowest 10% had access to paid leave.



Access to paid sick days is higher. Sick days allow a worker to miss work to recover from an illness when the recovery time needed falls short of requiring FMLA.



Nationally, 68% of private sector workers have access to paid sick days, but only the minority of low wage workers do. Just 38% of workers in the leisure and hospitality industry have paid sick days.

Paid leave and paid sick days have become even more critical during the coronavirus pandemic. Paid leave is necessary to **prevent the spread** of COVID-19. Moreover, paid leave is necessary to **protect public health** and give sick workers **time to recover** without the risk of eviction or hunger.

**Parents and caregivers** are another large group for whom paid leave during the pandemic is especially important. Many **workers' caregiving responsibilities have increased** substantially. It is important that these workers not be forced to **choose between their jobs and their families**. Paid leave is particularly important for women because they typically take on a larger share of caregiving responsibilities than men.<sup>281</sup>

The U.S. Congress passed **emergency paid leave policies** in March 2020 through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA).<sup>282</sup> Under the FFCRA, some workers were entitled to **two weeks** of paid leave at their **full rate of pay** if they were quarantined due to the coronavirus, **two weeks at two-thirds of their pay** if they needed to care for a loved one for COVID-19-related reasons, and **ten additional weeks at two-thirds of their pay** if they could not work because they had to care for a child whose school or care was unavailable.

Many workers were included in the FFCRA that are excluded from the FMLA, including part-time workers, contract workers, and recent hires.<sup>283</sup>

However, the FFCRA emergency paid leave policies were temporary and expired on December 31, 2020.<sup>284</sup> Additionally, the FFCRA had several other gaps in coverage. For example, large firms with over 500 employees were not covered. Small businesses with fewer than 50 employees could seek an exemption from the ten weeks of paid leave for childcare.<sup>285</sup> Organizations that employ "health care providers or emergency responders" could apply to be exempt from all paid leave policies.<sup>286</sup>

The **most significant problem** with the emergency paid leave program was its exclusion of workers at organizations with 500+ employees.<sup>287</sup> Workers at companies like McDonald's, Wal-Mart, Kroger, and Amazon were entitled to **no paid leave** - not even if they were sick with COVID-19. Workers at these large businesses make up the majority of the workforce.<sup>288</sup>

**In the US, a maximum of 47% of the workforce could obtain emergency paid leave through the FFCRA. At most, only 45% of workers had access in Ohio.**<sup>289</sup> These estimates assume that no employers who could apply for exemptions from the FFCRA's emergency paid leave policies did. **If all eligible employers obtained an exemption from FFCRA policies, only 17% of workers in the U.S. and Ohio had access to emergency paid leave** while the FFCRA was in effect.

## Policy Recommendations & Action Items

Expand and guarantee paid family and medical leave for all workers

The lack of a comprehensive paid leave policy increases stress on families and communities. The need to **choose between getting paid and fulfilling caregiving obligations** exponentially **increases this stress**. Significant economic stress increases the risk for IPV. Increasing workers' access to paid leave is **one step that can be taken now** to reduce violence in the U.S.

## Paid Leave Barriers and Opportunities

### Barriers

- Only a quarter of even the highest paid workers have access to paid family leave. Only 4% of lowest wage workers do.
- Between 55 and 83 percent of Ohio workers could not access paid leave under the temporary federal program.
- Temporary paid leave from the federal government expired at the end of 2020 and has not been renewed.

### Opportunities

- For the first time, emergency federal paid leave policies for the pandemic included part-time and contract workers, as well as recent hires.
- Most full-time workers have access to paid sick days, although this is heavily concentrated among workers who are paid more.

References can be found at <https://www.odvn.org/intersecting-pandemics/>