



Labor Pains

Improving Employment and Income Security for Pregnant Women and New Mothers

Melissa Alpert and Alexandra Cawthorne

Introduction

Workplace policies affecting work and family balance are out of touch with the reality of modern family life in the United States. Worker benefits—including paid leave and health care—are modeled on a traditional two-parent household in which one parent works a single 9-to-5 job while the other manages household and childcare responsibilities. People who do not conform to this model are often left out in the cold. Part-time workers, for example, often have little or no access to benefits, including unemployment insurance when they lose their jobs.

Most households no longer conform to traditional notions of the American family. Single motherhood has dramatically risen in recent years, and unmarried women now account for nearly 40 percent of new births.¹ Many two-parent families lack the resources to maintain a single, nonworking caregiver. More than 70 percent of children are raised in families that are headed by either a working single parent or two working parents.² And with

Parenting with Dignity

A Series Exploring Real Supports for Pregnant Women

Jessica Arons

In the debate over finding “common ground” on abortion, much has been made of the fact that, when asked why they chose to have an abortion, many women say, “I can’t afford another child right now.” Given this response, some have suggested that providing additional supports to pregnant women might help reduce the abortion rate. The thinking goes that if women feel the economic obstacles are too great to carry a pregnancy to term—especially an unintended pregnancy—then policies that ease those burdens may help a woman ultimately give birth to a child that she

wants to have. An alternative line of thinking suggests that if a woman is trying to decide between abortion and carrying to term, additional supports may tip the balance and lead her to choose having the child.

The Center for American Progress continues to believe that, per the public health data, widespread access to contraception is the most effective method available for reducing unintended pregnancy, especially when coupled with medically accurate sex education. Unintended pregnancy

is, after all, the proximate cause of the vast majority of abortions. We also believe that the government should not be in the business of promoting one moral viewpoint over another, nor should it try to persuade individuals to make particular health care decisions that have no bearing on public health outcomes.

Nevertheless, we do believe in taking a comprehensive approach to addressing reproductive health needs and we feel that it is an important policy objective in its own right to provide better supports to pregnant women, regardless of any potential subsequent effect on the abortion rate. We will therefore be examining, through a series of issue briefs, a variety of meaningful ways in which we can better address the needs of pregnant women.

When a woman says she can't afford a child, she is not just thinking of the nine months of pregnancy, the first few months after the child is born, or even the child's first few years of life. She is most likely thinking about the next 18 years—or beyond—and how she will clothe, bathe, feed, house, nurture, and educate another human being for that entire period of time.

She may already have one or more children to care for—indeed 6 out of every 10 women who have abortions are already mothers. She may be

the primary caretaker for a disabled or elderly member of her family. She may want a family one day but feel economically or emotionally unprepared to start one now. She may or may not have a partner who is willing to help raise a child. She may be working, unemployed, or trying to finish her education so she can better support herself and her loved ones. If working, she may have secure employment, or she may be one sick day away from a pink slip. She may be in perfect health, have a chronic illness, struggle with addiction, or suffer intimate partner violence. She may have health insurance, or she may be uninsured. She might consider adoption or may think it is out of the question.

In short, a multitude of factors may affect her decision to continue or terminate a pregnancy. And “I can't afford a child right now” can encompass a number of these factors. Diapers and formula are clearly not sufficient. Systematic changes to health care, the workplace, the adoption system, and others are necessary to have a real effect on the lives of pregnant women.

The first installment of this series explores ways that the workplace treats pregnant women and what can be done to strengthen their employment and income security.

four out of every five jobs lost in this recession belonging to men, women are becoming the primary—or even the sole—breadwinner in an increasing number of American households.³

The decision to have a child still complicates women's interactions with the labor market, despite their significantly increased workforce participation and attachment. Three-quarters of women entering today's workforce will become pregnant at least once while employed, and a significant portion of these women will be pregnant while applying for jobs.⁴ Those who become pregnant while working will generally not leave the workforce.⁵ Most of these women will continue working well into their sixth, or—more commonly—their ninth month of pregnancy. And more than 40 percent will return to work less than three months after giving birth.⁶

Pregnant women have a stronger connection to the workforce than ever before, but public policy has done a very poor job of integrating them into the labor market. Pregnant women face even more barriers to full employment and to economic security than women who are not pregnant. Outdated and damaging gender stereotypes often lead to employer concerns about hiring pregnant women or women they think are likely to become pregnant in the near future. But in a major recession with record job losses, discriminatory hiring and firing practices have become harder to detect and address.

Denying pregnant women the opportunity to work may deprive many women and families of vital income, not to mention many of the benefits that often accompany secure employment. Bias against pregnant women sometimes also leads to discriminatory treatment against all women of reproductive age because they are viewed as having the potential to become pregnant and thus a possible burden on workforce productivity. Women need to be able to rely on the labor market and know that they will be treated fairly.

In order to follow through on the rhetoric about providing supports to pregnant women, policymakers must take action to support increased and consistent labor market participation among all women, especially pregnant workers. The policy actions we recommend include combating discrimination in the labor market; promoting flexible scheduling; improving family leave options; increasing breastfeeding accommodations in the workplace; establishing a system of quality, comprehensive childcare; and expanding access to Temporary Disability and Unemployment Insurance. Addressing these areas will ensure that pregnant women and new mothers have the economic and employment security they need to start or grow their families.

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Barriers to secure employment and income for pregnant workers and new mothers

Pregnancy discrimination in hiring and firing

Pregnant women are an especially vulnerable subset of the labor force. Employers are reluctant to hire, or to continue employing, them for a variety of reasons. Otherwise qualified pregnant candidates may seem less appealing to some employers because of fears about potential workplace disruption due to a woman's taking maternity leave and costs associated with adopting more flexible work schedules for parents of young children. Some employers would rather lay off pregnant or newly parenting women than fire other employees who they perceive as presenting fewer immediate disruptions to workplace functioning.⁷

Employer concerns about hiring pregnant women are often grounded in stereotypes about gender roles and responsibilities.⁸ Some employers do not view pregnancy as a temporary condition that can be immediately and effectively accommodated for a predetermined period of time. These employers actually view motherhood as a “permanent disability” that will forever divide a woman's loyalty between her family and employment.⁹ This fear is founded on an assumption that women, due to their biologically and socially reinforced “maternal nature,” will serve as their child's primary—and possibly only—caregiver regardless of marital status. No similar assumptions have been observed in employer hiring practices of potential and actual fathers. In fact, men may slightly benefit from their status as a father.¹⁰ Yet women are actually equally, if not more, productive than men as working parents. Reasonable accommodations in the workplace and flexibility for mothers to attend to caregiving needs have been shown to provide higher job productivity, employee satisfaction, and morale.¹¹

This discrimination is not merely hypothetical. Pregnant women across the globe face these obstacles to workforce participation, and the recession has only intensified their barriers to job security. Studies have shown that pregnant women are among the first to be let go during recessions, even in countries with some of the strongest protections for pregnant women in the workforce.¹² Pregnant women who are seeking employment are in an even worse predicament. A recent United Kingdom survey found employers admitting to a host of “under the radar” discriminatory practices, including using female applicants’ age and marital status to predict whether they might become pregnant while employed.¹³ More than three-quarters conceded that they would not hire a woman if they knew she would become pregnant soon after starting her job.¹⁴

Discrimination on the rise

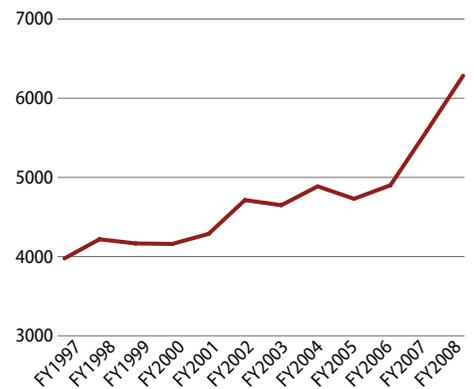
U.S. employment law recognizes pregnant women’s unique vulnerability and offers them workplace protections. The 1978 Pregnancy Discrimination Act amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act to make discrimination against pregnant women illegal, correcting a Supreme Court decision that erroneously failed to recognize discrimination on the basis of pregnancy as sex-based discrimination.¹⁵ It prohibits employers from considering a candidate’s pregnancy in hiring and other employment decisions, and requires that employers treat pregnant women like they do “other persons not so affected but similar in their ability or inability to work” for the purposes of determining work and leave arrangements.¹⁶ Title VII also prohibits discrimination against employees with parenting responsibilities, if that discrimination is based on gender stereotyping about parental roles.¹⁷

Yet the Pregnancy Discrimination Act is inherently weak because it is an equity model in which the standard is male disability. That means employers only have to provide the same accommodations to pregnant employees that they provide to disabled ones. Thus, an employer with a “no leave” policy for all its employees would not be in violation of the PDA, even if the policy has a disproportionate effect on pregnant employees.¹⁸

Complaints filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under the pregnancy provisions of Title VII have shot through the roof during the current recession.¹⁹ At the beginning of the recession in 2007, reports of pregnancy discrimination climbed 12.3 percent over the previous year, to an all-time high of more than 5,500 complaints. As the recession continued to deepen the following year, reports increased another 11.1 percent to 6,285 (See figures 1 and 2). These instances were found in all sectors of the economy,

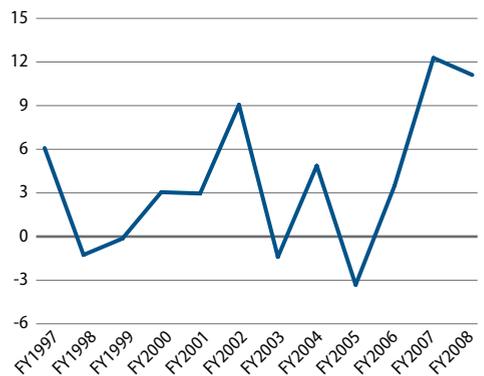
Consistent rise in number of claims filed

Number of discrimination complaints received by EEOC



Recession leads to dramatic increase in claims

Percent change in discrimination complaints



even those traditionally associated with and dominated by women, such as retail, services, finance, real estate, and insurance.²⁰ These complaints represent women of all races, but the number of cases filed by women of color has risen at an even greater rate than for white women.²¹

What's more, the number of pregnancy discrimination claims had been on the rise since well before the current recession—and so have the number of claims that are successfully settled. One study found that in financial terms, the monetary awards to pregnancy discrimination plaintiffs rose from \$3.7 million in 1992 to a high of \$20.6 million in 2000.²²

This trend is in direct contrast with the (incorrect) impression many people have that pregnant women are somehow entitled to extra protection from firing or discriminatory job actions. “Labor law’s flimsy shield often comes as a shock to women,” reports the *New York Times*. According to one woman who was laid off seven months into her pregnancy, “Everyone assumed it was illegal or against some moral code to fire a pregnant woman.”²³ But in fact, a number of lawsuits are pending across the country brought by women who have claimed that they were fired or denied employment on account of their pregnancy. News outlets have reported on a variety of troubling cases of discrimination claims by pregnant workers. An auto service technician in Arizona was immediately fired after telling her boss she was pregnant.²⁴ A decorated New Jersey cop was denied an accommodation her doctor recommended, even though injured men were routinely offered less physically taxing positions.²⁵ Even a maternity store in Florida refused to hire qualified pregnant candidates—and then fired an Assistant Manager for complaining about the practice.²⁶

Striking as they are, the numbers of complaints do not tell the whole story of pregnant women’s experiences in the labor market. Title VII exempts employers with less than 15 employees from complying with any of its protections, even though a significant portion of small business employees are women. It is also likely that many instances of pregnancy discrimination remain unreported because many women view discrimination cases as “career killers” that can ruin their chances of future employment.²⁷ Most discrimination cases do not make it to trial, but when they do, trials are time-consuming and difficult for the complainant to win. With many barriers to success, women already responsible for caring for newborn children may find that the time, resources, and emotional costs of a trial outweigh its potential benefits. The weakened economy only makes trial success less likely as layoffs are more easily justified. Even EEOC lawyers have begun to voice concerns that current law is insufficient to protect pregnant women’s rights.²⁸

Inflexible work schedules

The responsibilities of pregnancy and new motherhood can make it difficult for working women to “prove themselves” on the job by working extra hours. Many employers expect their employees to work above and beyond their contractually scheduled hours, often on short notice. American workers tend to face steep additional demands on their time both

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during and outside of work.²⁹ Many employees report working extra hours, and more than a fifth describe their overtime work as mandatory.³⁰ New mothers and women in late stages of pregnancy can find it difficult to meet these inflexible demands for unanticipated overtime work while still ensuring that they can attend to their prenatal health needs or care for their children.

Some commentators incorrectly argue that women voluntarily sacrifice better-paying opportunities in order to take jobs that give them the freedom to adjust their schedules to their caregiving responsibilities. They attribute any economic disparity between men and women to women's preference for more "family-friendly" jobs with flexible hours.³¹ But the facts do not support that assertion. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women are actually less likely than men to have a flexible work schedule.³² They are also less likely than men to work from home at least one day per week.³³ This exclusion from flexible work arrangements makes managing work and home life especially difficult for new mothers.

Even though women serve as the primary caregiver in many households, research has found that women with children are even more likely than men with children to have rigid schedules.³⁴ In fact, they are the group least likely to have a say in determining when their workdays start and end; in contrast, men with children are the most likely.³⁵ Single mothers are the workers who most need workplace scheduling that accommodates their childcare needs, but they are even less likely to be able to determine their own hours and take time off as needed.³⁶

This disparity in flexibility also has strong racial undertones. Black employees are more likely to lack control over their schedules than white workers, regardless of gender.³⁷ And those jobs that currently offer flexible scheduling tend to be limited to high-income workers—managers and those who work more than 50 hours per week.³⁸

Inadequate family leave protections

An essential component of work flexibility is access to family and medical leave. Employment before and after childbirth is critical to the economic well-being of a family, yet a pregnant woman will need to leave her work temporarily to deliver and care for her new child. Current law offers women only limited assurance that employment will be available upon their return. In fact, the United States is only one of two industrialized countries that do not require a minimum amount of paid parental leave. And the government of the other country—Australia—has made a commitment to and is moving toward guaranteeing paid leave. What's more, according to the International Labour Organization, the only other nations in the world with no paid maternity leave are Lesotho, Swaziland, and Papua New Guinea.³⁹

The 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act grants workers 12 weeks of unpaid leave, during which time they can prepare for, deliver, and care for their newborn child. This leave also can be used to care for a sick family member. The Act protects employees who use this

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leave from being fired or losing their current pay or level of responsibilities. But it is nevertheless limited in scope.

The FMLA covers only a subset of workers. Nearly 40 percent of Americans currently employed do not qualify for its protections.⁴⁰ In order to be eligible, workers must be employed by a company maintaining at least 50 employees annually, have been working with their current employer for at least 12 months, and have accrued at least 1,250 hours during the past year with that same employer. The Act does not cover many individuals who work part-time or workers who have been on the job for less than a year. These workers are more likely to be low income and are most in need of guarantees that employment will remain available to them after childbirth.

The Act also fails to adequately address a new mother's need for basic income during her maternity leave. The FMLA does not require employers to pay workers during their time on leave, nor does it establish a system of federally provided leave pay. Taking any amount of guaranteed leave is incredibly costly for workers if they do not have even partial income support. Almost half of high school graduates and about 35 percent of women with Bachelor's degrees return to work before the end of three months—most because they cannot afford to take unpaid leave for the full period of time allowed by the law.⁴¹ Almost four-fifths of workers report being unable to take leave because they could not afford it.⁴²

The recession is only making this problem worse. Some women are returning from maternity leave to lower wages as more employers try to cut costs,⁴³ and they may find themselves needing to go back to work earlier to keep from falling even further behind.

Insufficient accommodation for breastfeeding

Breastfeeding has been shown to improve newborns' immune systems and decrease their risk of serious disease later in life.⁴⁴ It can also improve maternal health and is associated with lower rates of osteoporosis and premenopausal breast cancer.⁴⁵ Yet restrictive workplace policies prevent many women from breastfeeding. One survey found that equal numbers of employed and unemployed mothers initiated breast-feeding, but by the time their infants were six months old, only 10 percent of women working full-time reported that they were still breast-feeding compared to 24 percent of non-employed women.⁴⁶

Most working mothers do not have on-site child care at their workplaces, which often makes it impossible for them to directly breastfeed their infants. And many women, particularly lower-income women, do not have the accommodations needed at their workplace to expel and store breast milk. Higher-paid professional women tend to have more autonomy to take breaks as needed, and can often find company support in the form of company-supplied private lactation rooms, breast pumps, and refrigerators.⁴⁷ But lower-paid mothers often lack breaks to express milk and appropriate facilities in which to do so. These women may be

forced to pump their milk in public restrooms, spend their lunch breaks using their breast pumps, or dispose of their milk after pumping it due to a lack of onsite refrigeration.⁴⁸ Many low-income mothers want to offer “the best for [their] child,” but workplace policy leaves them simply unable to do so.⁴⁹

The economic and racial disparities in breastfeeding are also striking. Women in the highest income bracket are about 50 percent more likely to breastfeed infants who are six months of age than women in the lowest income bracket.⁵⁰ Even among children of the same socioeconomic group, black infants are less likely to be breastfed than white infants.⁵¹ Women’s ability to feed their children their own milk should not be limited by income or race.

A lack of affordable, quality childcare

Access to affordable quality childcare is essential to ensuring new mothers’ ability to maintain employment and support their families. The vast majority (71.3 percent) of women with children under age 18 are in the labor force, including more than three out of every five women with children under three years old.⁵² The numbers are even higher among women of color. More than three-quarters of African-American mothers work—including nearly 65 percent of women with children under three years old. Over 90 percent of these working women will turn to childcare arrangements to supplement their caregiving activities.⁵³

Women’s daycare options are severely constrained by the familial and economic resources available to them. More than half rely on family members to supplement their caregiving; less than a third utilize formal daycare.⁵⁴ This is likely because formal daycare can be very costly, with average prices ranging from \$4,055 to \$15,895 per year, depending upon geography, child’s age, and quality of care.⁵⁵ Access to formal childcare is not surprisingly directly related to income: Women in the top income quintile are 70 percent more likely than women in the bottom quintile, and 29 percent more likely than women in the middle quintile, to place their children in formal daycare arrangements while working.⁵⁶

Poor women and their families are disproportionately affected by the current daycare system’s costs and inadequacies. Poor women spend less in absolute dollars on childcare, but a much higher proportion of their total income on formal care for their children.⁵⁷ Many of these women are forced to choose low-quality or unstable child care, to go into debt, or to lose time from work—a “solution” that may cost them their job.⁵⁸

Existing government programs to assist these women are insufficient to meet demand. Head Start only reaches about half of qualifying children, and federal childcare block funds distributed through states only reach one in seven eligible families.⁵⁹ The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit operates by decreasing tax liability and thus has almost no effect on the poorest families.⁶⁰

No job loss safety net for pregnant women

Pregnant women often lack access to the safeguards that are typically in place to support unemployed workers. Unemployment Insurance, or UI, was established via a federal-state partnership to offer workers a portion of their original earnings during times of need. Pregnant women are not technically excluded from the program, but they may have difficulty meeting its requirements.

Nearly half of the states categorically deny UI benefits to part-time workers—most of whom are women. And in order to qualify for UI, applicants must have been terminated from prior employment “through no fault of their own.” Leaving a job on account of pregnancy is usually considered voluntary and is therefore not covered.⁶¹ And applicants must be actively seeking new employment and available to work upon being offered a job. Women with difficult pregnancies that keep them from working, who are in the late stages of pregnancy, or who are recovering from giving birth have particular difficulty meeting these requirements as they are often unable to actively look for jobs and unable to start immediately upon being offered a position.⁶²

The government offers few alternative options for these new and expectant mothers and their families. Pregnancy qualifies as a “temporary disability” under all state definitions, but only five states, Puerto Rico, and the railroad industry currently offer their workers Temporary Disability Insurance.⁶³ This program compensates workers for a portion of their income lost due to a temporary non-occupational disability, and it may be the only available source of income for pregnant women who are unable to collect unemployment insurance.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Women Infants and Children program offers supplemental food to qualifying mothers and children, but its scope is also limited. Qualifying families must earn an income of less than 185 percent of the poverty level and also be judged by a health professional to be at “nutrition risk.”⁶⁴ This program offered basic nutrition assistance to only about 2 million women and their families in 2008—a fraction of the parenting population.

Solutions: Supportive policies for pregnant women’s labor market participation and income security

There is much more our country can do to ensure that pregnant women and new mothers have the economic and employment security they need and deserve to start or grow their families. We can improve women’s ability to maintain employment and access the resources they need to have healthy and thriving families by building upon and strengthening existing laws and policies. Policymakers can take the following actions to support increased and consistent labor market participation among all women, especially pregnant workers:

Pregnant women often lack access to the safeguards that are typically in place to support unemployed workers.

Combat discrimination against pregnant women in the labor market

We must fight discrimination against women, especially on account of pregnancy, by strongly enforcing our already-existing anti-discrimination laws. As EEOC lawyers have noted, the current system may result in many employers engaging in discriminatory hiring practices without consequence due either to post-hoc justifications or underreporting.⁶⁵ The courts have watered down our anti-discrimination laws over time, making it harder for employees to prove discrimination. Congress must correct these mistakes and penalize any adverse job decisions prompted by discriminatory intent against pregnant women, even when combined with otherwise legitimate reasons. Employer actions that have a disproportionate effect on pregnant women also should be prohibited. Finally, Congress must ensure that the EEOC has the resources necessary to investigate and prosecute these cases and to educate women about what does and does not constitute pregnancy discrimination.

Promote flexible scheduling

Flexible work schedules can be an effective and cost-efficient way for businesses to support working mothers and mothers-to-be. They enable a woman to adjust her work schedule to meet family needs, while at the same time ensuring that she is a productive and efficient member of her company. These programs are also good for business and have been shown to increase worker loyalty and productivity and decrease absenteeism and turnover.⁶⁶ More than a quarter of workers currently utilize some form of flexible scheduling.⁶⁷ But many workers are denied the option, particularly the low-income and single women most in need. Twenty states so far have begun to promote and reward businesses that offer employees flexible scheduling, but much remains to be done.⁶⁸ Government should work to advance manageable work-life balances for working mothers by aiding the expansion of flexible scheduling to middle- and low-income workers in a way that ensures more sustainable productivity.

Improve family leave options

It is essential to the health of both mother and child that working women be able to take time off from work to ensure a healthy pregnancy, a safe delivery, recovery for the mother, and proper infant care. Many women are not eligible for FMLA and many of those who are eligible are unable to take full advantage of its guarantees because they cannot afford to lose 12 weeks' worth of income. The Center for American Progress has proposed a cost-effective, universal paid leave plan that can be incorporated into the Social Security system without threatening the solvency or soundness of the system.⁶⁹

Increase breastfeeding accommodations

Employer supports for breastfeeding women can save companies the health- and absenteeism-related costs of limited breastfeeding options. The federal government should follow the example of states such as California—which mandates that employers need to allow a break and provide a room for a mother who desires to express milk in private—to ensure that employers make an effort to accommodate breastfeeding women.⁷⁰ Solutions can include offering breaks, appropriate and private facilities to pump milk, refrigerated spaces to store milk, individual breast pumps, or on-site daycare to facilitate direct breastfeeding.⁷¹ The Breastfeeding Promotion Act, introduced by Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), along with Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR) amendment to the Affordable Health Choices Act promoting accommodation of lactation, can help address this need.

Establish a system of quality, comprehensive childcare

Policymakers should explore a comprehensive system of guaranteed childcare that ensures children are safe, well-cared for, and ready for school. This will help ensure that mothers are able to return to work and sustain their employment. The existing program of federal childcare block grants has failed to reach most of the children in need.⁷² The government should instead focus on establishing federal-state partnerships that guarantee childcare for all families below 200 percent of the federal poverty level while respecting parental choice. It should also revamp the Child and Dependent Care tax credit to provide progressive benefits to cover between 50 percent and 20 percent of related child care expenses and establish a Federal Early Care and Education Strategy Fund to boost state funding for underfunded programs such as Head Start and pre-kindergarten.⁷³ In addition, the Early Learning Challenge Grant program, proposed by the Obama administration, would challenge states to develop effective, innovative models that promote high standards of quality and a focus on outcomes across early learning settings, and dedicate \$10 billion over 10 years toward this effort.

Expand access to unemployment insurance and Temporary Disability Insurance

It is also important to ensure that pregnant women who are unable to work are able to meet basic living needs for themselves and their families. The federal government could establish a system of Temporary Disability Insurance, modeled after existing state systems, which would provide vital income for millions of mothers among the nearly 240 million Americans residing in states without this option. Temporary Disability Insurance fills the gaps in UI coverage by ensuring that those workers who cannot meet the rigid UI eligibility requirements—including pregnant workers—are nonetheless able to access its basic protections.

Alternatively, federal and state governments could build upon the progress that has been made with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which has produced a wave of unprecedented state UI reforms that include the expansion of UI benefits to individuals who leave work due to family responsibility conflicts.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Many of these proposals will be familiar to those who advocate for work and family balance policies. But these challenges also can be viewed as reproductive rights issues. Reproductive rights encompass not only the right to determine whether and when to have children, but also the right to become a parent and to parent with dignity by being able to meet all of a child's basic needs.⁷⁵ If a woman wants to carry an unplanned pregnancy to term but is concerned about how she will be able to afford to raise a child, knowing her job is secure and that she will be treated fairly in the workplace will certainly provide some reassurance. And establishing stopgap measures for unemployed pregnant and parenting women would also help new mothers stay afloat.

The fact is that our reproductive years happen to coincide with our most productive working years. Our society does not ask men to choose between work and family, and it should not ask women to do so either. What's more, the vast majority of jobs no longer provide the wages and benefits necessary to maintain a full-time caregiver, even if a woman would like to stay home with her children. Women need to be free from discrimination and provided with adequate supports for meeting their responsibilities both inside and outside of the home in order to maintain consistent workforce attachment while starting or building their families. Government and business must work together to create the institutional systems necessary to help women provide for their families, meet their children's basic needs, and fully participate in our economy.

Many proponents of finding "common ground" on the abortion issue have highlighted the need to provide support to women facing unintended pregnancy so that they feel they can indeed afford to have a new child. Our federal policies and practices not only fail to provide such support; they actually permit multiple forms of discrimination against pregnant and parenting women. Addressing this discrimination—and advancing policies that truly support the women who choose to parent—should be a common ground issue for those committed to helping women carry to term and raise the children they want.

If "family values" are to mean anything, they must be backed by a commitment to valuing families. We all benefit from a society that offers a stable foundation upon which strong, healthy families can grow and thrive.

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