

Dear Members of the Commission to Develop a Paid Family and Medical Leave Benefits Program,

I am the founder of a grassroots organization called Paid Leave for ME. I started this organization in March of 2019. We currently have 348 members. I can trace my passion for Paid Family and Medical Leave to three significant moments in my life. The first was my time as a Human Resources Professional. Watching co-workers dip into the negative of their earned paid time off while they struggled with an illness. Explaining to expecting mothers how the bulk of their maternity leave would be unpaid.

The second was the birth of my son who had to stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) for 4 weeks. I would hear mother's frustrations with lack of paid leave from their employers and how they had to go back to work at the same time they would be bringing home their baby. How come short term disability only considered the health of the mother and not the health of their struggling baby?

The third was my own health struggles after the birth of my second child. That is when I had my ah-ha moment. Driving home from a physical therapy appointment to address injuries I had sustained during my daughter's birth. Frustrated by how slowly my body was healing and struggling with, unbeknownst at the time, postpartum depression, my thoughts drifted to the new families who did not have the same financial and emotional support that I had.

I worked for one organization during my time as a Human Resources Professional that employed people who lived and worked in New Jersey. When expecting mothers would call our leave department about their upcoming maternity leave they would learn that they had an extra month of leave called "baby bonding" which was provided by their state's paid family leave program. This extra month allowed these employees to have more time to bond with their baby, heal from their birth and figure out arrangements for when they returned to work.

As a Mother, Wife, Daughter and human being, the time is now to create and implement a Paid Family and Medical Leave System. These systems will help change our work culture to become more family friendly. The time is more dire than ever with COVID still very well and alive in our world. As you go through this process of getting the facts, compiling the data and hearing the stories, I urge you to remember that we will **all** go through a "life event" that could take us out of the workforce during our lifetime. Thank you for all your hard work thus far!

Elli Lisa  
Founder of Paid Leave for ME