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Take Another Look at Paid-Leave Statistics

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Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner's March 6 letter cites misleading paid-leave statistics. It states that only 15% of all working people have access to paid leave, likely relying on an often-cited Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) number. Actually, many more workers take paid leave, but the BLS doesn't count it due to its peculiar survey methods which require paid leave to exist separately from "sick leave, vacation, personal leave or short-term disability leave that is available to the employee."

Parents with conventional benefit programs often save and pool paid personal leave, vacation, sick leave and short-term disability in the event of a birth or adoption. Unconventional benefit packages, like paid time off accounts or unlimited paid-leave programs also don't count under the BLS survey. Parents use these leave variations as paid leave in case of a birth or adoption. They do so because they are paid and leave.

That is why BLS numbers don't match with virtually any other national data set or surveys of parents on the topic including the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation, its Current Population Survey and the Family and Medical Leave Act worksite and employee surveys. National surveys agree that between 40% and 60%-plus of workers receive paid leave. A nationally representative study by the National Partnership for Women & Families indicated 63% of employed mothers were provided paid maternity-leave benefits.

It's important we use clear statistics when discussing paid-leave proposals.

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