

Sen. Hesselbein: Governor's Budget advances family medical leave

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Being able to take leave from work to care for family members is an important priority for Wisconsin residents, but taking leave has often been financially impossible due to the associated loss of income when away from the job. An opportunity exists to overcome this barrier: paid family and medical leave.

The current Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) only authorizes unpaid leave. Governor Evers proposes to launch PAID family & medical leave for private sector parents, a program that would provide greatly needed, highly popular and long-awaited relief for families facing a significant crisis.

Specifically, the Governor's budget would expand access to FMLA to workers who work 680 hours (recognizing that parents and family members who work multiple or part-time jobs have an equal right to play a role in their families' lives) - and institute paid family and medical leave for significant crises.

Seeded by an investment of \$243 million in our parents, families and children from the historic surplus Governor Evers has built, families would qualify for paid leave for health and family emergencies covered by our current Family and medical Leave law (and several expansions we will cover shortly).

Importantly, going forward beyond our current surplus, the program would be carried on by employer and worker contributions, similar to rightfully popular and highly successful programs like Social Security and Medicare. It is a practical program easily funded for the long run.

Vital to the realities of Wisconsin family life, the program would also expand to include leave for grandparents, grandchildren and siblings needing care. Current

law allows Wisconsin families to have time to address a child, parent or spouse's serious condition.

Respecting the unique challenges faced by those serving in the armed services, FMLA would expand to cover military deployments. Equally important, FMLA in the Governor's budget proposal would include time off for parents when a child's school is closed unexpectedly, and for family members facing or caring for loved ones under quarantine.

Wisconsin was long a national leader in making policy breakthroughs that improved the quality of life for families. This is our opportunity to do it again. Governor Evers, in his budget proposal, has given us the chance to be near the vanguard on paid Family & Medical Leave. It is time to act on this proposal, it is time to move forward; On Wisconsin!