



ISSUE BRIEF

TECH COMPANIES ARE LEADING THE WAY ON PAID FAMILY LEAVE, and the Rest of the Country Should Catch Up

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A new survey from the Pew Research Center finds that the majority of working parents (56 percent) say it is difficult for them to balance their job responsibilities with their family responsibilities.¹ More working mothers find it difficult (60 percent) than working fathers (52 percent), but a majority of both admit the severe challenge of being a working parent. While distressing, this should not be surprising, considering the lack of family-forward leave policies in the United States.

The United States is one of three nations in the world that does not offer any paid maternity leave, and the only OECD nation without one—one of nine OECD nations without paid paternity leave and one of two without paid sick leave.² As a result, only 13 percent of people working in the United States have access to paid family leave through their employer.³ This means that many parents in dual-earner households are faced with a painful choice: either one parent must quit working and stay home to care for their new child, or together they must forgo a huge slice of family income to pay for

daily child care. For single parents, the challenge is even more significant.

For a nation that is committed to family values and putting children and families first, this is simply wrong, for multiple reasons. If parents continue working, it undermines parental bonding with new babies and newly adopted children. It is harmful to child development and child and maternal health. If one parent decides to quit work in order to stay home, it has a major impact on gender equality (because it is usually a mother who takes on that role). Furthermore, because this hole in our workplace policy often results in terminated careers and reductions in earnings precisely when new families need income the most, it has serious consequences for families, businesses, and the national economy.

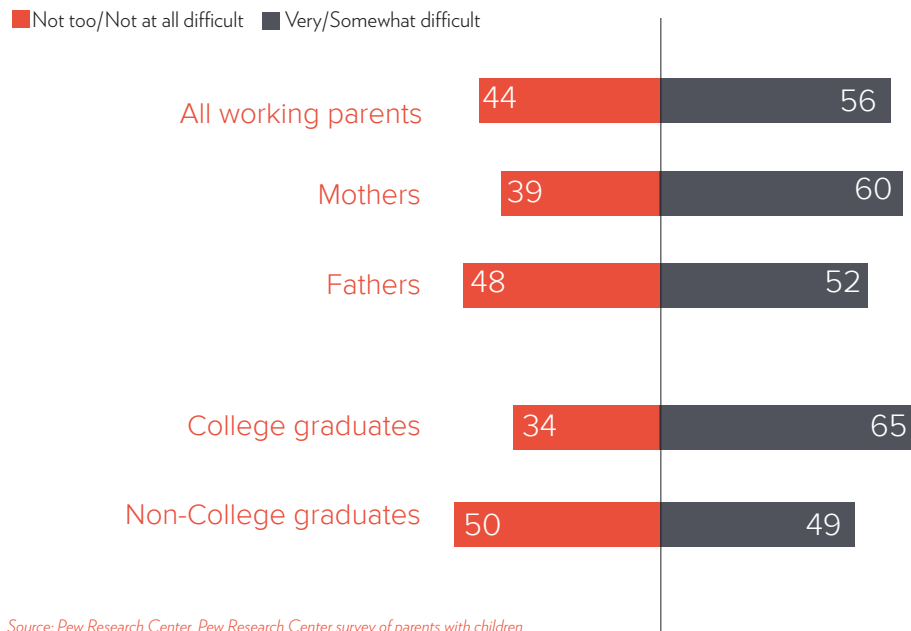
There is some good news, however. In recent years, more and more private companies have recognized and acted on the need for family-forward policies, particularly paid parental leave. From Virgin to Nestle

This brief can be found online at: <http://apps.tcf.org/tech-companies-paid-leave>

FIGURE 1

SIX-IN-TEN WORKING MOMS SAY BALANCING JOB AND FAMILY IS DIFFICULT

% saying it is _____ for them to balance the responsibilities of their job with the responsibilities of their family



Source: Pew Research Center, Pew Research Center survey of parents with children under 18, September 15–October 13, 2015.

to Goldman Sachs, companies throughout the United States are recognizing that paid parental leave is not just the right thing to do—it is good for their employees, and, perhaps more motivating, good for their bottom lines.

Nowhere has the advance of paid family leave been more apparent than in the technology sector. For example, as recently as November 2, Amazon, which has been criticized for its challenging workplace culture, announced an expansion in their paid leave policy to include fathers for the first time and to provide more time for caregiving and recovery for mothers.⁴ Amazon is just part of a larger trend of technology companies that have been at the forefront of these efforts, using their family-forward policies to compete for and retain talent, and yield significant profits.

Paid leave policies have made great progress, but still have a long way to go. The more family-forward paid leave policies being adopted by the technology sector deserve celebration, and should serve as inspiration for other employers and help propel the national conversation about paid family leave. This brief describes the current policy landscape around paid leave; examines the many ways in which paid leave benefits families, businesses, and the economy; and catalogues the major advances the technology sector has taken in offering family-friendly policies. The bottom line, however, is that government has a crucial role to play in valuing and investing in families and communities by establishing a national paid leave standard.

THE CURRENT STATE OF U.S. PAID FAMILY LEAVE POLICY

Twenty-two years ago, President Bill Clinton—at his very first bill signing ceremony—signed into law a major piece of family leave legislation. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) was a big win for family-forward work policy, as it includes three significant advances for people working in the United States.

First, FMLA guarantees twelve weeks of job-protected leave. This means an individual can take time off and feel secure knowing her or his job—or a substantially similar one—will be there when she or he returns. Health insurance coverage also continues throughout this leave.

Second, FMLA goes beyond maternity leave to also include paternity leave, or parental leave. This gender neutrality is important because, even though women are often primary caregivers, men are starting to take on greater caregiving roles. Having men play a greater role in caregiving not only is important for greater gender equality, but also benefits men and their family members.

Third, FMLA also includes medical leave for serious illnesses—not only to treat and address an individual's health issues, but also that for a close family member in need. This means everyone has a stake in the policy, since serious illnesses can impact men and women and their close family members. In fact, since FMLA became law, serious illnesses have become the number one reason for taking leave. A Department of Labor report released on the twentieth anniversary of the FMLA found that 55 percent of leaves are taken for one's own illness, while 21 percent of leaves taken are for pregnancy or a new child and another 18 percent for the illness of a qualifying family member.⁵

Unfortunately, like most legislation that undergoes the sausage-making process of compromise in the U.S. Congress, FMLA had several major omissions when signed into law, the most glaring of which was that, while the act provides a guarantee of job protection, there is no accompanying promise of pay. Companies can choose to provide pay, or employees could be forced to use paid vacation and sick time to make up the difference. While many employees do receive some pay through their employers during leave, according to the Department of Labor, the majority of those who go on leave take only ten days' worth, and 40 percent say that they had to return to work because they could not afford to take a longer leave. Of those who do not take leave at all, despite needing it, 46 percent say it is because they cannot afford it.⁶

In addition, FMLA's coverage is far from universal. A whopping 40 percent of the workforce is left uncovered by FMLA because the act applies only to companies with fifty or more employees and employees who have worked for the same employer full time for the past year.⁷ Also, while FMLA covers employees who need to take time to care for a mother, father, spouse or child, it does not apply if the relative is an in-law, sibling, or of other close affinity.

STATES AND CITIES TAKE STEPS FORWARD

California, New Jersey, and Rhode Island have all enacted state paid family leave laws. As three of the five states that have laws establishing Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI)—which provides income replacement during short periods of leave—all three states used TDI as the basis for the insurance program supporting paid family leave. The family leave plans in California and New Jersey provide six weeks of partial income replacement through their insurance programs; Rhode Island provides four weeks of partial income

replacement.⁸ Studies find that these policies work well for families and employers alike.⁹

Other states have started moving forward on paid leave as well. In 2007, Washington State passed paid family leave legislation, but implementation has been delayed. In addition, in 2015, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded \$1.55 million in competitive grants to help states, municipalities, and federally recognized tribes to conduct feasibility studies for paid leave programs (and evaluate existing programs). California, Montgomery County (Maryland), New Hampshire, New York City, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, and Washington State have all received these grants.¹⁰ This investment comes on top of \$500,000 in grants that the Department of Labor's Women's Bureau awarded in 2014 to Massachusetts, Montana, Rhode Island, and Washington, D.C.¹¹ Other municipalities have acted on paid leave as well, such as Cincinnati, Ohio, which has instituted six weeks of paid family leave for city employees.¹²

These state and local programs are not only making progress for families in those regions, but also are helping to build momentum for federal paid family and medical leave legislation. In 2013, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro first introduced the FAMILY Act—a national paid family and medical leave program to provide individuals with twelve weeks of partial income when they take time off for FMLA purposes. The bill seeks to ensure that no one need risk losing a much-needed paycheck by taking time to care for family. More importantly, it would establish a minimum standard for individuals working in every industry and in businesses of every size. Congressional support for this legislation has been growing.

WHY DO WE NEED PAID FAMILY LEAVE?

Having a new child enter a family's life is a significant change. Childbirth itself can be traumatic. Adoption processes can be exhausting and challenging. And when that fragile, newborn baby or a new child finally becomes part of a family—it can require great care, and can change family dynamics as well. Early parenthood can be an emotionally fraught time, with decreased sleep and increased financial vulnerability.

And it is precisely during this stressful time that our federal family leave policy fails, forcing parents to return to work all too quickly—because they cannot keep their jobs or paychecks otherwise—without acknowledging the time that parents need to care for themselves and their new family members. This failing reflects poor prioritization. New babies and their caregivers should be a top priority, and the time they need for care, bonding, adjustment, and recovery should not be a “nice to have,” but rather a “must have.”

Author and activist Jessica Shortall's recent Ted Talk includes the following stories that make this case:

“I gave birth to twins and went back to work after 7 unpaid weeks. Emotionally, I was a wreck. Physically, I had a severe hemorrhage during labor, and major tearing . . . so I could barely get up, sit, or walk. My employer told me I wasn't allowed to use my available vacation days because it was budget season.”

“We adopted our son. When I got the call, the day he was born, I had to take off work. I had not been there long enough to qualify for FMLA so I wasn't eligible for unpaid leave. When I took time off to meet my newborn son, I lost my job.”

“I feel tremendous grief and rage that I lost an essential, irreplaceable, and formative time with my son. Labor and delivery left me feeling absolutely broken. For months, all I remember is the screaming. Colic, they said. On the inside I was drowning. Every morning I asked myself how much longer I could do it. I was allowed to bring my baby to work. I closed my office door while I rocked and shushed and begged him to stop screaming so I wouldn’t get in trouble. I hid behind that office door every fucking day and cried while he screamed. I cried in the bathroom while I washed out the pump equipment. Every day, I cried all the way to work and all the way home again. I promised my boss that the work I didn’t get done during the day I would make up at night from home. I thought, there is just something wrong with me that I can’t swing this.”

“I went back 8 weeks after my C-section because my husband was out of work. But without me, my daughter had failure to thrive. She wouldn’t take a bottle and started losing weight. Thankfully, my manager was very understanding. My mom was allowed to bring my baby, who was on oxygen and a monitor, four times a shift so I could nurse her.”¹³

Fathers have similar problems, too. Josh Levs, a former CNN correspondent, tells of how his daughter was born five weeks prematurely. With two young children already in need of care, he asked his company for more paid time off. They had a policy of ten weeks of paid leave for mothers, but not for fathers. Levs sued CNN when it refused to give him leave, and has since become an activist on this issue.¹⁴

These stories put a human face on the hardships parents face when they do not have access to paid leave. And

as it turns out, paid leave has been demonstrated to have positive effects for parent.

Paid Leave Improves Health

Nearly one out of every four women who gives birth in the United States returns to work just two weeks later.¹⁵ A two-week-old infant needs constant care and affection, and is months away from sleeping through the night. In addition to the stress introduced when caring for a newborn child, childbirth involves physical and emotional strain for the mother as well, which requires time to recover. Returning to work only two weeks after giving birth—leaving a newborn behind—does not provide a mother enough time to physically and emotionally recover from childbirth, causing stress and depression, and placing additional strain on the whole family.

Dr. Mark Shuster, who served as the 2014-2015 President of the Academic Pediatric Association, has said: “Both scientific research and our clinical experience tell us that children need their parents at critical times in their lives [including the] important weeks following birth.”¹⁶ Maternity leave has been linked to improved child health outcomes ranging from increased birth weight to decreased premature births.¹⁷ It also increases the rate and duration of breastfeeding for infants, which has been shown to have a positive impact on the health of both mothers and babies.¹⁸

When parents take time off to care for their new children, children experience better health outcomes. International analyses have also shown that parental leave can lower mortality rates.¹⁹ Newborns whose mothers take longer leaves are more likely to be taken to the pediatrician for regular check-ups and immunizations, and more likely to be breastfed. Studies have found that an additional ten weeks of paid leave for new parents, on average, reduces post-neonatal mortality by up to 4.5 percent.²⁰ In addition, the longer

a new parent can take off with a newborn, the better it is for bonding. After all, it takes about three months for a newborn to start to recognize a caregiver's voice, face, and smell.²¹

In addition, while parents who adopt do not need time off to recover from childbirth, they need time off for other reasons. If they adopt in the United States, they are required to stay in the state where the adoption occurs for seven to ten days, in accordance with the Interstate Compact on Placement of Children.²² If they adopt abroad, they need to account for travel time and the rules of the country from which they are adopting. Beyond these rules and requirements, adoptive parents also need time to adjust to the emotional changes of incorporating a new family member, and need time to care for and bond with their new children as well.

Paid Leave Increases Gender Equity

Despite the fact that women comprise approximately half of the workforce, and are primary or co-breadwinners in more than 60 percent of households with children, women are also still the primary caretakers in the majority of households.²³ One consequence of the lack of paid family leave (as well as inadequate access to high quality, affordable child care) is that women are leaving the workforce to care for their children.

In one study, economists Francine Blau and Lawrence Kahn looked at why women's labor force participation in the United States has been declining, and found that: Nearly a third of the relative decline in women's labor-force participation in the United States, compared with European countries, can be explained by Europe's expansion of policies like paid parental leave, part-time work and child care and the lack of those policies in the United States. . . . Had the United States had the same policies, they calculated, women's labor force participation rate would have been seven percentage points higher by 2010.²⁴

Access to paid family leave leads to greater workforce attachment and earning capacity. The Center for Women and Work at Rutgers University found that women who took paid leave following the birth of a child in the United States were better off economically than those that did not (controlling for other differences between the two groups). Leave takers were more likely to be working than non-leavers nine to twelve months after childbirth, and were 54 percent more likely to report wage increases in the following year.²⁵

Presidential candidate and former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina recently defended her position against a federal paid family leave policy, saying: "In other countries, these mandates have discouraged employers from hiring and promoting women."²⁶ However, what is missing in Fiorina's analysis is that gender neutral policies—where men and women have equal access to leave—equalize the playing field. While men are still lagging behind in using leave that is available to them, the numbers using unpaid family leave are slowly increasing. In a 2012 Department of Labor survey of the FMLA, 16 percent of men reported taking leave, and that number has been slowly but steadily increasing.²⁷ Not surprisingly, even more men are interested in taking leave when it is paid.

A recent study of fathers in the United States found that 89 percent of respondents said it was important for employers to provide paid paternity or paid parental leave.²⁸ California saw a 400 percent increase in the number of fathers taking paid leave between 2005 and 2013, as the state's program became better established and known.²⁹ In 2014, when Rhode Island's paid family leave policy went into effect, a greater proportion of new fathers took leave to bond with a newborn or adopted child than did new fathers in the first year of the California or New Jersey programs.³⁰ This may be because of the greater awareness of the policy, and the broader cultural shift making it more of the norm

for fathers to take leave, especially when it is paid. In addition, according to the National Partnership for Women & Families, “studies of two-parent, opposite-sex households show that fathers who take two or more weeks off after the birth of a child are more involved in that child’s direct care nine months after birth than fathers who take no leave.”³¹

Gender-neutral paid leave policies support women’s workforce participation, men’s caretaking participation, and greater gender equity.

These policies are also important to gay fathers to care for their children. An estimated 37 percent of adults who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT)—about 3 million—have had a child at some point in their lives.³² A recent study by the Families and Work Institute found that more same-sex, dual-earner couples than different-sex couples share routine (74 percent versus 38 percent) and sick child care (62 percent versus 32 percent) responsibilities.³³ Ensuring paid leave laws are inclusive of LGBT parents requires that the laws are gender neutral.

THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF PAID LEAVE

Reduced Income Inequality

The lack of paid leave contributes to income equality. Lower-income families have less in savings and fewer resources to rely on when a new child enters their lives, which makes it even harder for them to afford to take time away from earning a paycheck. According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, well-paid people who work in managerial or professional occupations at companies with one hundred employees or more are the most likely to have paid family leave. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data backs this up, showing that the lowest quartile of wage earners are only 5 percent likely to have access to paid family leave, as compared to 21 percent of the highest quartile.³⁴

In addition, while some people use their paid sick or vacation time to cover leave, almost half of all people paid less than \$550 a week receive no paid personal leave, sick leave, family leave, or vacation at all.³⁵ In fact, 41 percent of working parents with household incomes below twice the federal poverty level do not receive paid sick leave, vacation days, personal days, or other forms of compensated leave.³⁶

While those earning the most are using their paid leave or managing to take unpaid leave and keep their jobs and cover their bills with savings or their partner’s pay, lower-income individuals are faced with impossible choices between career and family, and falling further behind—creating greater income inequality.

Increased Family Economic Stability

The Department of Labor reports that 60 percent of people without fully paid leave have trouble making ends meet. They postpone paying bills, draw down on savings, and cut leave short.³⁷ Fifteen percent of those who received partial or no pay during their family or medical leaves report relying on public assistance to help make ends meet.³⁸ Taking time out of the workforce can have longer term consequences for families as well. It can be harder for people who leave their jobs for caregiving purposes to return to the workforce and when they do they may have to take pay cuts and have more trouble getting raises and promotions. This has major impacts on family economic stability.

Better Business Competition

Over the past two years, more and more large companies have announced that they have adopted family-forward policies, and in particular, paid parental leave. Employers are adopting these policies because it is the right thing to do, it is good for their employees, and it is good for business. In a recent letter to Congress, more than 200 business school professors wrote:

All of the available research—from employer-generated studies to analyses of the state paid family leave programs in California, New Jersey and Rhode Island, to data that reflect the experiences of people fortunate enough to work for employers that offer some form of paid leave, to analyses of parents’ experiences in other countries—demonstrates the clear benefits of paid leave.³⁹

Specifically, the California research from the Center for Economic Policy Research found that 91 percent of employers reported a positive or no noticeable effect on profitability/performance as a result of paid family leave, and many benefited from cost savings because employees were more likely to stay with their employers.⁴⁰

As Microsoft executive vice president of human resources Kathleen Hogan wrote in her blog, they “believe it’s [their] responsibility to create an environment where people can do their best work” and that includes “flexibility needed to spend time with new children.”⁴¹ For Tawni Craz, chief talent officer at Netflix, it is about being able to attract and retain talented employees, and supporting them to be their best at work:

Netflix’s continued success hinges on us competing for and keeping the most talented individuals in their field. Experience shows people perform better at work when they’re not worrying about home. This new policy, combined with our unlimited time off, allows employees to be supported during the changes in their lives and return to work more focused and dedicated.⁴²

THE FAMILY-FORWARD NATURE OF TECHNOLOGY COMPANY POLICIES

When Donna Morris, senior vice president of people and places at Adobe, announced in their company blog their new paid leave policy, she wrote, “We join an industry movement to better support our employees while striving towards increased workforce diversity.”⁴³

This industry movement is raising the profile of paid leave nationally. As technology companies compete for talent and recognize the benefits of these policies to their productivity, the movement highlights that paid leave is a smart business strategy.

In a 2013 article in *Mother Jones*, reporter Dana Liebelson wrote:

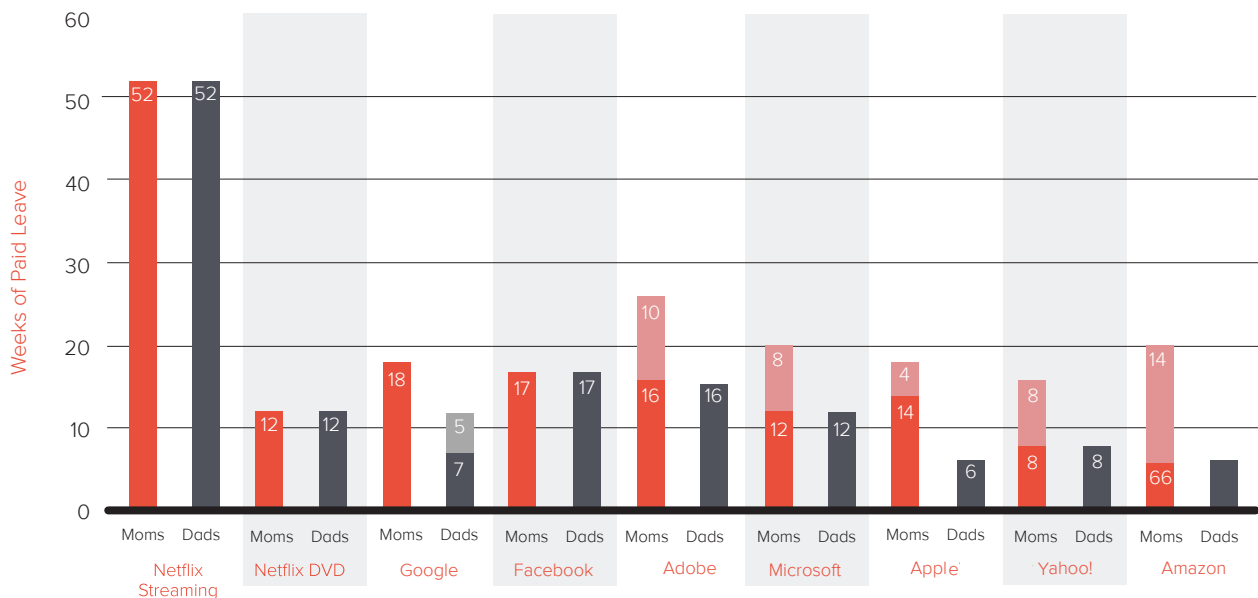
America remains one of the few countries in the world without mandatory paid leave for new parents, but tech giants are jostling to attract and keep the best talent, triggering a benefits arms race in Silicon Valley that has led to longer leave, cheaper child care, and perks like onsite doctors and dry cleaning.⁴⁴

Even in the two years since she wrote that article, more and more tech companies have expanded their paid leave policies.

In recent years, Netflix, Adobe, Apple, Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Yahoo! and Amazon have all adopted family leave policies that are 100 percent paid.⁴⁵ These companies do not reflect the majority of American businesses. Each employs thousands of people (Amazon, Apple, and Microsoft each employ more than 100,000 individuals). Their workforces are primarily comprised of white-collar, highly educated and skilled employees. Their headquarters are in California, which has had a paid family leave law in effect since 2004, or in Washington State, which passed but has

FIGURE 2
WEEKS OF PAID PARENTAL LEAVE AT TOP TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES

■ Number of Paid Weeks for Mothers ■ Additional Number of Paid Weeks for Birth Mothers
 ■ Number of Paid Weeks for Fathers ■ Additional Number of Paid Weeks for Primary Caregiver Dads



Source: Author's analysis and compilation from company websites and other sources.

yet to implement a paid family leave law.⁴⁶ For Netflix, Google, Facebook, Adobe, and Apple in California, this means that they are supplementing state law with their leave policies. The California law provides eligible employees (most people working in the state) up to six weeks of wage replacement at 55 percent of their usual weekly earnings, up to a maximum benefit when they take leave to care for a new child or seriously ill family member.⁴⁷ Mothers in California can also access additional pregnancy-related short-term disability leave.⁴⁸ For the individuals who work for companies with more generous leave policies in California, these laws are a baseline upon which the company policies build.

Netflix

Netflix offers the most generous and gender neutral

policy—unlimited leave up to one year (fifty-two weeks) for both mothers and fathers in the streaming division.⁴⁹ Netflix received bad press for not also offering the same policy to the employees of their DVD division, where the workforce tends to be lower-income, hourly, part-time and/or temporary.⁵⁰ Netflix explained that they run the streaming and DVD sides of the company separately, and those in the DVD division still have access to twelve weeks of paid leave for both mothers and fathers.⁵¹ So, while the discrepancy between the policies for the streaming and divisions feeds into income inequality to some extent, the DVD division still has access to more generous paid leave than the majority of the country. Still, the division is reflective of a troubling larger national trend of disparate treatment of the lowest earners.

Google

Google offers eighteen weeks of leave for new mothers.⁵² New parents, regardless of gender, who plan to take an equal or primary role in their child's care during the first year, can receive up to twelve weeks of paid baby bonding time (this includes adoptive/surrogate caregivers). Other caregivers are still eligible for seven weeks of paid baby bonding time. Their leave comes with full pay, stock vesting, and benefits.⁵³ Google has additional family-friendly policies, ranging from \$500 for baby bonding to child care assistance in the forms of child care centers, help finding child care, discounts for nanny placement centers, and free membership to the parental service website Care.com.⁵⁴ They also have "mother's rooms" equipped with hospital-grade sterilization tools in all Google buildings, and provide new parents with \$500 toward baby supplies.⁵⁵

Facebook

Facebook offers seventeen weeks to both mothers and fathers, which can be taken all at once or spread out over the first year after the birth or adoption of a child. Facebook provides parents \$4,000 to spend on new children, subsidized child care, the option to work from home, and \$20,000 worth of family planning benefits (which covers egg freezing, sperm retrieval procedures, and fees to use a surrogacy agency). Facebook also has designated breast-feeding rooms at its Menlo Park location.⁵⁶ In addition, Facebook requires that their contractors and vendors provide a minimum fifteen paid days off for holidays, sick time and vacation, and for those workers who do not receive paid parental leave, a \$4,000 new child benefit for new parents. (They also require contractors to pay a \$15 minimum wage.)⁵⁷

Adobe

Adobe offers sixteen weeks to both mothers and fathers, and an additional ten weeks of medical leave for birth mothers, for a total of twenty-six weeks. Full-time employees are immediately eligible for the policy upon hire. Adobe also provides ten weeks of medical

leave to any full-time employee who needs it for surgery, medical illness, or other emergency, as well as four weeks of paid time off for family care (to care for a sick family member).⁵⁸

Microsoft

Microsoft provides twelve weeks of paid leave for both mothers and fathers, and an additional eight weeks of medical, or "maternity disability" leave for birth mothers, plus two weeks of short-term disability leave in the two weeks prior to the scheduled due date so that mothers can manage the physical impact that often comes with late pregnancy and to prepare for the upcoming birth. In addition, Microsoft provides flexibility for when eligible parents can take leave—either in one continuous twelve-week period, or split into two periods. Parents can also choose to phase back into work on a half-time basis.⁵⁹ Microsoft also requires its contractors and vendors to provide their employees who perform work for Microsoft with fifteen paid days off for sick days and vacation time.⁶⁰

Apple

At Apple, new mothers may be able to take a fully paid maternity leave for up to four weeks before the baby's due date, and fourteen weeks after the baby is born. Eligible non-birth parents (both mothers and fathers) can take up to six weeks off with full pay. They also offer an adoption assistance program, in which Apple reimburses eligible expenses associated with the legal adoption of a child. Apple also offers egg freezing.⁶¹

Yahoo

Yahoo offers eight weeks paid leave for any Yahoo employee who has a new child while employed at Yahoo, including birth, adoption, foster child placement, or surrogacy. They offer an additional eight weeks of paid leave for pregnancy (so, for birth mothers, up to sixteen weeks total). The policy is available to both salaried and hourly employees, who are each eligible upon being hired. Employees who accrue vacation days may use them to extend their leave. In addition, the leave time

can be taken anytime within one year of birth, adoption, or foster-care placement.⁶²

Yahoo also provides new parents with a reimbursement to assist with new child related expenses and has a new child gift program. In addition, they cover up to \$20,000 for infertility treatments, including in vitro fertilization (IVF). The usual co-pays, deductibles and co-insurance still apply. In addition, Yahoo offers unlimited paid sick days.⁶³

While Yahoo has been criticized for not being family friendly, particularly with the additional scrutiny that comes from having a working mother as CEO, overall, they have a much more generous policy than most companies. One note, though: Yahoo’s website lists paid leave for new parents under “Rest and Relaxation.”⁶⁴ That seems like an easy fix—perhaps they can add “family” to the headline.

Amazon

Amazon has been under scrutiny recently for what the New York Times called their “bruising workplace” culture and practices.⁶⁵ Until recently, Amazon offered no paid time off for new fathers and provided only eight weeks of paid leave for new mothers.⁶⁶ On November 2, Amazon announced a new, expanded paid leave policy. Birth or adoptive parents of either gender now will receive six weeks of paid leave, and birth mothers will receive up to a total of twenty weeks of paid leave, including four weeks before the birth of the baby. Full-time employees—both hourly and salaried—will have access to the leave policy. In addition, parents can share a portion of their leave with partners or spouses who do not have leave from their own employers. Amazon will also provide the option to return to work part-time for up to eight weeks for primary caregivers.⁶⁷ Parents have to have worked at the company for a year before qualifying for the leave policy.⁶⁸ Amazon told its employees that these changes were a response to

surveys and focus groups of their employees, and also “benchmarking with competitors’ offerings.”⁶⁹

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF TECH SECTOR POLICIES

As a result of the actions of these eight employers, more than 300,000 individuals now have access to 100 percent paid parental leave. That means mothers who work for these companies are able to take time off to bond with their new babies, recover from childbirth, and care for their babies. Newly adoptive parents are able to take the time they need to go through the adoption process, bond, adjust to parenthood, and care for their children. Both mothers and fathers now have access to at least some paid leave at each of these companies. In each case, parents and children will reap the emotional and physical benefits from this time and the families can count on continued paychecks and not having to make impossible choices about which bills to pay. This takes a huge economic burden off of these parents during a challenging time.

In addition, by putting these policies in place, employers demonstrate that they understand that paid parental leave is the right thing to do, and is also good for attracting and retaining talent, getting the most out of employees, and an important business practice. Perhaps Donna Morris of Adobe put it best when she wrote about their policy:

At Adobe, we often say that our most important assets leave the building at the end of the day. Our employees are our intellectual property and our future. Now we will better support all of them, across a spectrum of age, gender and experience, with a diverse mix of family needs and situations. The investment is unquestionably worth it.

And Susan Wojcicki, CEO of YouTube (owned by Google), described the positive business effects when she wrote:

When we increased paid maternity leave to 18 from 12 weeks in 2007, the rate at which new moms left Google fell by 50 percent. (We also increased paternity leave to 12 weeks from seven, as we know that also has a positive effect on families and our business.) Mothers were able to take the time they needed to bond with their babies and return to their jobs feeling confident and ready. And it's much better for Google's bottom line—to avoid costly turnover, and to retain the valued expertise, skills and perspective of our employees who are mothers.⁷⁰

THE NEED FOR FEDERAL ACTION

The technology companies that provide generous paid leave policies—particularly those that offer the most gender-neutral policies—are to be commended. They prove that policies like paid leave are not only viable in a business environment, but also make good business sense. They help us see what is possible, and that employers can make it easier for parents to manage their work and family responsibilities while maintaining their economic security. More employers should consider these models and adopt similar policies to support their employees, attract and retain talent, and improve productivity.

Even with 300,000 employees newly covered, however, the vast majority of the workforce remains without access to paid family leave. Paid leave should be a standard for all businesses and families nationally, not just those who work for large technology companies. Unfortunately, families who need paid leave the most—those with the lowest incomes and fewest resources—are the least likely to have access to it. And too many employers are still focusing on maternity leave without providing equal paternity leave. In addition, policies on their own are a vital start, but without a supportive work

culture to go with them, the policies may not translate into real life. National legislation that sets a national standard of paid leave can help make it an integral part of the culture of the way we work.

Cities and states have shown the importance of the public sector role in providing paid family leave, but without federal policy, too many families remain left out. Senator Gillibrand and Congresswoman DeLauro's FAMILY Act, the proposal for a national paid family and medical leave program to provide individuals with twelve weeks of partial income, would ensure that millions of Americans have access to the paid leave they need.

President Barack Obama and all of the Democratic presidential candidates have endorsed paid family leave because they understand the importance of having this national standard.⁷¹ Republican candidate Marco Rubio also has a paid family leave proposal, but it is essentially an optional one, so it would not set the national floor needed. Yet, the fact that Rubio put out a proposal at all reinforces that elected officials and candidates understand that families are struggling with managing their work and family responsibilities and need this kind of forward-thinking policy to make it all work.

A national paid family leave program is not a “nice to have.” It is a “must have.” Technology companies are paving the way. Their policies are a start, but far from the national standard families and businesses need to make it work today.

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