

washingtonpost.com

U.S. Family-Oriented Job Policies Weak

By DAVID CRARY

The Associated Press

Thursday, February 1, 2007; 7:01 AM

NEW YORK -- The United States lags far behind virtually all wealthy countries with regard to family-oriented workplace policies such as maternity leave, paid sick days and support for breast-feeding, a new study by Harvard and McGill University researchers says.

The new data comes as politicians and lobbyists wrangle over whether to scale back the existing federal law providing unpaid family leaves or to push new legislation allowing paid leaves.

The study, officially being issued Thursday, says workplace policies for families in the United States are weaker than those of all high-income countries and many middle- and low-income countries. Notably, it says the U.S. is one of only five countries out of 173 in the survey that does not guarantee some form of paid maternity leave; the others are Lesotho, Liberia, Swaziland and Papua New Guinea.

"More countries are providing the workplace protections that millions of Americans can only dream of," said the study's lead author, Jody Heymann, founder of the Harvard-based Project on Global Working Families and director of McGill's Institute for Health and Social Policy.

Among the study's findings:

_Fathers are granted paid paternity leave or paid parental leave in 65 countries, including 31 offering at least 14 weeks of paid leave. The U.S. guarantees fathers no such paid leaves.

_At least 107 countries protect working women's right to breast-feed; the breaks are paid in at least 73 of them. The U.S. does not have federal legislation guaranteeing the right to breast-feed at work.

_At least 145 countries provide paid sick days, with 127 providing a week or more annually. The U.S. provides unpaid leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act, which does not cover all workers; there is no federal law providing for paid sick days.

_At least 134 countries have laws setting the maximum length of the work week. The U.S. does not have a maximum work week length or a limit on mandatory overtime per week.

According to the study, the U.S. fares comparatively well in some areas _ such as guaranteeing significantly higher pay for overtime work and ensuring the right to work for all racial and ethnic groups, regardless of gender, age or disability.

"The U.S. has been a proud leader in adopting laws that provide for equal opportunity in the workplace, but our work/family protections are among the worst," Heymann said. "It's time for a change."

The topic is of keen interest in Washington.

BALLY'S
ATLANTIC CITY®

THE
Ultimate Place
to Stay & Play!

\$59* Per Night

BOOK NOW

BALLY'S
ATLANTIC CITY®

*RESTRICTIONS APPLY

Advertisement

The Labor Department is examining regulations that give workers unpaid leave to deal with family or medical emergencies _ a review that supporters of the rules worry might be a prelude to scaling back these protections, as requested by some business groups. Comments to the agency on the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act _ which grants eligible workers up to a total of 12 weeks of unpaid leave a year _ are due by Feb. 16.

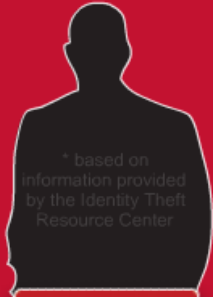
At the same time, Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn., plans to announce Thursday that he will propose new legislation that would enable workers to take six weeks of paid family leave. Congress also is expected to reconsider the Healthy Families Act, a bill introduced last session that would require employers with at least 15 employees to provide seven paid sick days per year.

On the state level, some New Jersey lawmakers are pushing legislation that would make their state the second, along with California, to provide paid family leave. Under one New Jersey proposal, workers who take leave would be paid through the state's temporary disability insurance fund, augmented by a 0.1 percent charge on workers' weekly wages.


Traditionally, many conservatives have opposed moves for paid family leave, but there are signs of some shifts. A prominent anti-abortion leader, the Rev. Paul Schenck of the National Pro-Life Action Center, recently said he would support paid maternity leave on the premise that it might dissuade some pregnant women from having abortions.

"Across the political spectrum, people are realizing these policies have an enormous impact on working families," Heymann said in a telephone interview. "If you look at the most competitive economies in the world, all the others except the U.S. have these policies in place."

in 2007
127
Million
had their personal
info exposed



Enroll Now



LifeLock
Guarantee Your Good Name
www.lifelock.com

© 2007 The Associated Press

Ads by Google

[Free WS FTP Download](#)

Over 40 million people use WS_FTP. Secure transfers, Vista compatible.

[Free WS FTP Download](#)

www.WSFTP.com/FileTransfer